

THE HISTORY OF EMPIRICISM IN  
AMERICAN THEOLOGY

---

Richard M. Trelease, Jr.



Library of the  
Church Divinity School  
of the Pacific

No. 17984 Class ZT T788


Ex Dono Author

Date June 1945









Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2025 with funding from  
Graduate Theological Union

<https://archive.org/details/historyofempiric00unse>











THE HISTORY OF EMPIRICISM IN  
AMERICAN THEOLOGY

By

Richard M. Trelease, Jr.

B. A., The University of Missouri, 1943

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for

the degree of

BACHELOR OF DIVINITY

In the

CHURCH DIVINITY SCHOOL OF THE PACIFIC

Berkeley, California

May, 1945

Approved:

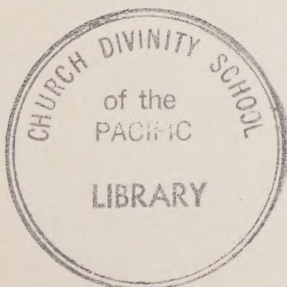
Randolph C. Miller  
Advisor

Harry H. Plummer  
Dean

Filed:

Date

Librarian







## CONTENTS

1888





## CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction. . . . .	1
PART ONE	
<u>Beginnings</u>	
Chapter I Influences from Abroad. . . . .	5
1. The History to Schleiermacher. . . . .	5
2. Fredrich Schleiermacher. . . . .	7
3. F. H. R. Frank . . . . .	12
4. Summary and Conclusion . . . . .	17
Chapter II The Glow in New England. . . . .	19
1. L. F. Stearns. . . . .	19
2. W. N. Clarke . . . . .	29
Chapter III William James and the Empirical Method	41
1. Introduction . . . . .	41
2. <u>The Will to Believe</u> . . . . .	43
3. <u>The Varieties of Religious Experience</u> . . .	49
4. <u>Pragmatism</u> . . . . .	57
5. Criticisms, Summary and Conclusions. . . .	63
Conclusion to Part One. . . . .	72



PART TWO  
Development

	Page
Chapter IV Douglas Clyde Macintosh, Religious Empiricism. . . . .	75
1. Introduction . . . . .	75
2. Methodology and Procedure. . . . .	79
3. Epistemology . . . . .	82
4. Critical Philosophy, Its Place . . . . .	91
5. Metaphysics. . . . .	96
6. <u>Personal Religion</u> . . . . .	103
7. Criticisms.. . . .	106
8. Summary and Conclusions. . . . .	114
Chapter V Henry Nelson Wieman, Rigid Empiricist. . . . .	119
1. Introduction , . . . .	119
2. God (The Place of Epistemology). . . . .	124
3. The Scientific Method and Approach in Philosophy of Religion. . . . .	136
4. Metaphysics. . . . .	145
5. Truth and its Verification The Place of Philosophy and Religion. . . . .	148
6. The Nature and Function of Religion: Its Emergence . . . . .	151
7. Worship. . . . .	157
8. Mysticism. . . . .	162
9. "Some Blind Spots Removed". . . . .	167
10. The Practical Task of the Church: The Ingredients of a Practical Faith for Democracy . . . . .	171





11. Criticisms. . . . .	Page 174
12. Summary and Conclusions . . . . .	182
Conclusion to Part Two. . . . .	185

PART THREE  
The Future

Introduction. . . . .	187
Chapter VI The Three Possibilities . . . . .	190
1. Edwin R. Walker: Empiricism Alone Is Enough. . . . .	190
2. James B. Pratt: A Suggested Middle Position of Naturalism. . . . .	199
3. Randolph C. Miller: The Possibilities of Analogical Theology. . . . .	208
Conclusion. . . . .	219
Bibliography. . . . .	222





## INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

Among the important trends in theology and religious development in this country, none is more important than the rise of the empirical method. For two reasons this is so: first, because it parallels in a sense the developments that are being made in the secular sciences; second, for that reason it is badly and incompletely understood, as to its method and the results that may be obtained. This is written, too, as an explanation of what various writers have held regarding empiricism. That we may see its rise and development in this country more clearly it will be necessary to turn to the Continent for a brief study, and then our efforts will be concentrated upon American contributions in this field.

It is true that we are dealing with a subject that has faint beginnings, one that is difficult to pin down as to the "founder", but as with all theological discussions, the roots go far back and we can only arbitrarily find a starting point. When we think of empiricism we must let ourselves be carried back to the earliest religious empiricists as far as Christianity is concerned, to Paul and the Gospel of Mark, for truly here is the beginning of what we are talking about. But this is impossible to do in a thesis of this length, and so we choose as a starting point, a point that seems to say to orthodox Theology: "You may be right, and if you are - fine,





but we want to find out for ourselves; we want this experience you talk about validated in our own consciousness, in our experience; we want it to be on a level all men can understand and experience."

Philosophically speaking, the British empiricists Locke, Hobbes, and Hume started off on this track in a secular vein, and their work is of great importance in philosophy and, more strictly, epistemology. For the early work in philosophy of religion we must turn to the Germans to find the sources of our study: to Schleiermacher, and Frank of the "Erlanger School". While these men are not the "copy books" of American empiricism, it is to their work that the two earliest American "empiricists" (if we can call them that) took their starting cue.

Our aim is not in the realm of definitions, but before we can proceed we must say a brief word about empiricism, and what it is.<sup>1</sup>

If we think of empiricism as strict limitation to the sensory experience, then there would not be much room for religious empiricism. But on a broader plane, the plane of religious, and possibly even mystical experience we have a base that offers opportunities for advancements, and for religious empiricism. Experience is a sound base to start on,

---

1

For a fuller definition of empiricism see: F. P. Dignam, An Empirical Christology, Chapter II



for even traditional and orthodox theology starts here; thus it should have no cause to exclaim when we say experience is the root of all religious truth for man. Concerning this matter William James has said:

Let empiricism once become associated with religion, as hitherto through some strange misunderstanding, and I believe that a new era of religion as well as of Philosophy will be ready to begin. (2)

Thus whatever we may say of empiricism, broadly interpreted we can say that it contains no real menace to religion, once it is understood. Thus we should suggest that perhaps for the purposes of historical study we must accept the definition of a wider empiricism, that deals not only with simply sensory data of the world around us, but also with the specifically religious data of the ages as it comes to us in Scripture, tradition, and the Church. In this study it is necessary that we take precaution not to anticipate our results or start with the idea of proving a conclusion which we have already drawn. It is true our definition is broad, but being broad it still has limits which will be naturally set by the men whom we study, and by their conception of what empiricism is. To limit it in definition now would be to narrow the field too much. In its early stages the definition was broad, narrowing as it developed in various men's thoughts.

---

2

William James, A Pluralistic Universe, p. 314, Quoted in: Knudson, Present Tendencies in Religious Thought, N. Y. Abingdon, 1924, P. 133





Knudson says that theological empiricism is theology based upon religious experience rather than upon metaphysical speculation. Thus there are two kinds of empiricists: those who seek to save theology by making it so different from the sciences that they (the sciences) cannot attack it; and those who try to make it a science such as Macintosh in Theology as an Empirical Science.<sup>3</sup> It is with the latter that we will be concerned for the most part. Further definitions will come out as we progress. This is simply an initial statement that will act as a general guide for us, our chart and compass as we progress.

Thus we turn to our study. In Part I we will be concerned with the rise of empiricism on the Continent and the early contributors to it in this country. As an arbitrary transition point we will consider the thought of William James as concluding the early period.

---

<sup>3</sup> Knudson, op. cit., p. 138



PART ONE

Beginnings



CHAPTER I  
INFLUENCES FROM ABROAD





## CHAPTER I

### INFLUENCES FROM ABROAD

#### 1

We could go back to the second century to begin this chapter, but that is impossible for the time we have. Let it be sufficient to say that the student who is willing to examine closely some of the early Alexandrian Scholars, such as Origen, Clement, and Athanasius, will find suggestions of the modern liberal empirical approach in their writings. These suggestions, I hasten to say, are not carried out in any complete sense. (e. g. Clement: Instructor Bk I; Stromatis)

In the middle ages there was not much interest in the subject as a whole. Men were concerned either with the mystical life with God, or the complete rationalistic and speculative Greek approach to theology. Empiricism was quite unknown (St. Thomas' superstructure invalidates what he starts out with, along this line), and ecclesiasticism that kept thought in narrow channels was largely responsible for this attitude. Salvation was a forensic and legalistic concept; it did not in any way depend upon the subjective experience of the believer, but consisted solely in belonging to the church. What the believer felt and thought was of no concern; there was thus no thought of experiential validation



of the objective phenomena in the religious rites of the day.

But with the Reformation a new spirit dawned. The personal and subjective conscience became increasingly important for the salvation of the individual; the importance of the inward spirit and the effect of divine grace on the individual became more important than simply belonging to the church. The early reformers rejected the authority of Rome and they needed a personal, and perhaps subjective, validation of experience in religion and scripture. Here was the point where advance might have been made along empirical lines, but men were not ready and the door that was partly opened was again closed, and the reformers themselves largely returned to authoritarianism and the authority of the individual Protestant bodies, or works they wrote, or the Fathers wrote before them. It was not until many hundreds of years later that the logical and rational implications of the Reformation came to the fore in the minds of theologians and philosophers of religion.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) made a great deal of the Christian experience and the evidence for it in the Christian life. He was one of the great Pietistic divines who reacted against the dead and dry intellectualism of his day. Pietism itself contributed little to empiricism, but even so, it is the soil from which the modern movement has come.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup>Knudson, op. cit., pp. 147-154 (Historical Summary)





It was in the latter part of the 19th century that German writers began to exert a real influence on American empiricism. Before this time the German writers who may have tended in this direction were largely irresponsible and unable to follow up the lines they suggested. There is one notable exception to this statement, and it is to this man, Fredrich Schleiermacher, that we must first turn in this study.<sup>5</sup>

## 2

Schleiermacher's influence was in no way directly felt by any early American empiricists, but his work is important because it influenced F. H. R. Frank, who was the direct influence of L. F. Stearns of Bangor, who is probably the first of the Americans in this field. For this reason it is important that we understand something of Schleiermacher's contribution in this field. He was born in 1768 and died in 1834, and was one of the great religious products of the German Enlightenment and Romantic movement. It was natural that this sort of environment would produce a man who would look for new explanations and validations for old facts. A re-awakening period always leads to re-discoveries or new discoveries in new directions.

Wieman and Meland classify Schleiermacher in this Romantic movement because he primarily put his emphasis upon

---

<sup>5</sup> F. H. Foster, The Modern Movement in American Theology, N.Y.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1939, P. 139



the feeling of the individual in the religious experience. This is subjective, true, but it is the first break: that the dogmatic facts of the past may not be true for every individual, and that religious reflection must be brought close to experience if it is to have any meaning at all. With Schleiermacher this feeling was general and rather vague, centering around no one specific object of devotion. Later members of the School, such as Ritschl centered their "feeling theology" about an object or person--the Historical Jesus for Ritschl.<sup>6</sup>

Schleiermacher started off by saying that the intellectual demonstrations of the doctrines of theology were irrelevant to the main course of theology for life. They did not, he said, convince the believer of the truth of Christianity, but simply are a description of the experience one has in Christian living, or of a Christian experience of a bygone age. The experience is to be thought of as completely independent and prior to the doctrines themselves. Every individual has an innate capacity for religion and a complete ability to have a religious feeling, which is essential as prior to dogma and doctrine.<sup>7</sup>

Now according to Schleiermacher's view, a system of doctrines ought to be an empirical description or expression of the experience of persons in

---

<sup>6</sup> H. N. Wieman and B. E. Meland, American Philosophies of Religion, N. Y.: Willett, Clark and Co., 1936, pp. 41-43  
<sup>7</sup> Richard B. Brandt, The Philosophy of Schleiermacher, N.Y.: Harpers, 1941, p. 281



which all phases of the religious development are considered systematically both in their historical connections and their relation to each other. (8)

This is the ideal that he sets up, but it is one that can never be completely realized since between the experience and any theology which we could set up there is a broad space; theology is usually too far behind experience, and into it come elements that are not a part of the original experience and thus invalidate it. The experiences themselves must be rigorously tested as to truth, and this is given no adequate statement in his plan. However, the principle that makes experience the norm of theology is valid and fruitful, and it is ridiculous to say that it has no meaning. The primary intention, that to keep theology and life close together is worthwhile, is one that is as apparent today as it was to Schleiermacher.<sup>9</sup>

Schleiermacher's whole system was devoted to going through the classical Christian doctrine to show that some things are adequate expressions of the Christian's religious experience as he knows it, and to organize these parts into a whole. Other parts of the classical doctrine may be rejected because they deal too much with metaphysics and not with religious feeling, and thus to him they have no bearing

---

<sup>8</sup>Brandt, op. cit., p. 281

<sup>9</sup>Knudson, op. cit., p. 187





upon the matter at hand.<sup>10</sup> This is as far as his empiricism in his theology goes; it is essentially a descriptive science of the experience of persons who may be members of any of the great religious traditions.

It is not our place to go any more thoroughly into the specific doctrines with which he works; that would carry us far afield. From this brief statement of his method we are able to gather what his approach is, and we will readily see that this is transmuted in later American theological thinking as we progress in this thesis. Schleiermacher's contribution may be said to be made in the distinctly subjective field of religious empiricism.

He goes on to discuss the relation between theology and philosophy. If theology is the systematic expression of feelings, then it is quite independent of philosophy, for theology has objective data for its content material even as the sciences. The study that involves cosmology and metaphysics is not necessary for theology since it has no place in the religious feeling.<sup>11</sup> This fact modern empiricism would seriously deny, but in beginnings we must not judge too harshly.

The main difficulty with the whole system is not that Schleiermacher did not have real facts to work with,

---

10

Brandt, op. cit., pp. 281-282

11

Ibid. p. 284



but that he did not analyze his meanings of the words "feeling" and "religious consciousness" in such a way as to satisfy the modern psychologist that he was sure he knew what he was talking about, thus rendering it very difficult for us to use his findings in an uncritical manner.<sup>12</sup> Thus he falls into the same trap that many of this "religious feeling group" do, that of subjectivism. No two people have quite the same reactions to a phenomenon and thus we cannot dogmatize on the theology of the experience in any universal or general sort of way. Schleiermacher rendered important service in making a distinct break with the past, in refusing to accept the old dogmas unless they could be validated in the present. But the quest must go further--for objectivity--before it can be of lasting value or before what Schleiermacher started with can be any more than a complete theological system for each individual. This seems to be the most serious defect.

Before leaving Schleiermacher it may be well to add just a word about his theory of knowledge which is important for a study of empiricism. It was a type of realism. He believed that the knowledge of the object, and the object itself were different in a sense, but that the mind could reach and know the object as an object. This he proved by

---

<sup>12</sup>

Brandt, op. cit., p. 292





saying that the sensory data can be organized by thought; thus thought becomes the media by which things and sense data become more than things--become experience. The objective reality is there; it exists to give content to thought; either without the other is meaningless. This Kantian realism is the basis for all that he says in his works,<sup>13</sup> and as a theory of knowledge is adequate for our approach (that the object can be known).

## 3

Perhaps the most direct German influence upon Stearns and Clark was exerted by Frank of the "Erlanger School", although his influence is somewhat hard to trace at times.

This school continued from Schleiermacher, and thought of itself as continuing his work. The main names were those of Hofmann, Thomasius, and Frank, of whom the latter is the only one we shall consider. These three made the Christian consciousness their norm of theology, but consciousness in a very narrow and limited sense. Its distinctive element is to be found in regeneration and conversion, and from this religious consciousness they deduce a form of Lutheran theology.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup>

Brandt, op. cit., p. 315

<sup>14</sup>

Knudson, op. cit., p. 161



F. H. R. Frank, born in 1827 and died in 1894, influenced Stearns of Bangor perhaps more than any one person. His own personal influence was not great and his book The System of Christian Certainty has not been well known. Through Stearns he has been brought to this country. His emphasis upon experience as the starting point in religion was later to revolutionize theology when once the idea that conversion was not the whole story, and that education played a part in the religious experience was realized.<sup>15</sup>

Frank was truly a conservative. He was convinced that the old truths of theology were true, and yet his methods at arriving at this truth and his thoughts were modern. His great attempt was to show that the old was true by dressing it up in new garb. His work was not nearly so radical as that of Schleiermacher, though his method was, and perhaps his innate conservatism made his work acceptable to the rather conservative Stearns, for in Frank's work Stearns could see the possibility of the objective validation in experience of the traditional proofs of evangelical religion.<sup>16</sup>

In Frank's great work, which we have already cited, he attempts to show that there is a basis of belief in the positive assurance of the Christian himself. This assurance comes only in the converted state, but is not subjective

---

<sup>15</sup>

Foster, op. cit., p. 141-142

<sup>16</sup>

R. Seeberg, Frank, Franz Herman Reinhold Von, in Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, N. Y.: Funk and Wagnalls, 1909, Vol. 4, p. 368



alone; it is the assurance of an objective cause. Accordingly, there are three main groups of objects in which the Christian can find certitude:

1. Immanent objects: as the effects of the objective cause inherent in the subject: knowledge of sin, the reality of the new life, etc.
2. Transcendant objects: God, the Trinity, the God-Man.
3. Transmittant objects: the Word, Sacraments and the Church. Or the historical media by which the other two are known. (17)

Frank objected to rationalism and the theories of F. C. Baur and D. F. Strauss because they denied the fact that the religious experience had any basis in fact. Frank, in opposition to their views, maintains that the certainty of the fact lies in the assertion of the Ego of the new man, and the degree of certainty is maintained by the degree of certainty of the Ego.<sup>18</sup> This of course is obviously a subjective sort of judgment, and the sort that we would hardly say is the best kind of assurance today, but in the light of Frank's attempt to maintain the truth of all the doctrines in the light of experience it seemed the only way for him to go. Modern empiricism would start with no such presupposition as this, that the facts are true, all of them, how can we sustain them?

---

17

Seeberg, op. cit., p. 369

18

Ibid.





Frank says that the task of theology is:

.....to grasp and represent the objects of the Christian faith in their inner connection.

and to do this one must start with the converted man and his belief in God, an objective belief, which is the first cause of all Christian realities.<sup>18</sup>

The specific problem that he wishes to deal with is that of Christian certainty based on experience. Of this task he says:

Christian certainty is distinguished from natural certainty, not by the fact that Christian certainty in general is of a moral nature, based on moral experience, but that it is of a peculiar moral nature, proceeding from a moral experience of a kind which the natural man as such does not make and cannot make. (19)

Thus it becomes clear that for Frank the whole proposition rests upon a peculiarly moral disposition of mind and heart that is Christian, and that there can be no certainty apart from the primary conversion which gives the peculiar disposition, and leads to certainty. This, in a sense, is something like empiricism. Stearns, in relying upon his results, says that we cannot think that Frank is writing an apology of the Christian faith, but rather Frank is simply calling for the scientific testimony that the faith can give of it-

---

18

Seeberg, op. cit. p. 369

19

F. H. R. Frank, System of Christian Certainty, Edinburgh: Edinburgh Clark, 1886 (Trans: Maurice Evans) p. 98



self in the experience of the individual.<sup>20</sup> This we must keep in mind when we consider this work of Frank and its effect upon Stearns. The importance of the work for us does not lie so much in what he has worked out, but more on the fundamental principles with which he starts. His method and the ideas that he has, his interest in experience are the things that influenced Stearns, and are thus our interest, since they form the background of the first American empiricist.

We must criticize Frank's work, for unless we see some of the errors we shall wonder why his ideas were not carried out more fully. In the first place his conclusions are completely out of proportion to the Empirical base on which he starts, or thinks he starts. It is not always the Christian experience that creates the faith as he says, but it is often the faith that creates the Christian experience. To base faith on Christian experience alone, is to base it upon itself and the argument gets nowhere. In the second place, the whole system is far too individualistic and subjective to form a general base for modern empiricism. The surrounding environment, theologically speaking, is not taken into account, and it is certain that the specific individual experience is not sufficient base for the determination of

---

20

L. F. Stearns, The Evidence of Christian Experience, N.Y.: Scribners, 1892, pp. 401-402



the whole truth of the content of Christian dogma. Against this subjectivism Ritschl and his school reacted so violently, that though they might have made a contribution to empiricism they went so far the other way that their work is completely outside of the scope of this thesis.<sup>21</sup>

## 4

We have considered the contributions of Schleiermacher and Frank to empiricism, but we are also concerned with their influence on the early American writers in this field. In Schleiermacher we have seen the rise of the idea of "feeling" in theology as a fundamental basis of what is true and what is not. In Frank, on the other hand, there is the belief that all is true, but that Christian experience after conversion makes the truth scientifically valid. Though Frank may have thought he was continuing to some extent the work of Schleiermacher, we may almost say that there are two completely independent strands represented here as they flow into American thought.

Schleiermacher seems the more individualistic of the two, and yet his fundamental presupposition that all must be validated before it may be considered true strikes a resounding empirical chord. Frank's initial method offers more hope for objectivity in empiricism than does Schleiermacher's "feeling" theology, but Frank's superstructure and

---

21

Knudson, op. cit., pp. 163-164





presuppositions that lead to it, cause his work as a whole to be un-empirical. The way in which these two strands were united in the works of two early American empiricists, Stearns and Clarke, is the task of the next chapter. This preliminary material must be our spring board, for it is where Stearns himself admits he gets his ideas.

---

We should note, that though the British empiricists do not enter our story directly, their work colors all empirical approaches. Their theories of knowledge and insistence upon experimentation will be seen more fully developed in Chapter IV as standing behind recent epistemological developments.



CHAPTER II  
THE GLOW IN NEW ENGLAND



## CHAPTER II

### THE GLOW IN NEW ENGLAND

#### 1

Truly it was a glow and not a raging fire that started with the publication of the work of L. F. Stearns of Bangor, The Evidence of Christian Experience; a fire might have started had not the work of this brilliant young man been cut short by a premature death.

As we have suggested, his work was largely based on that of Frank, in the latter's great work. Stearns makes full acknowledgment of his dependence in the appendix of his book. In fact, after reading the book and having some acquaintance with Frank one is almost willing to conclude that the work of Stearns was to translate Frank into terms that could be understood by the American mind of his day.

Stearns' book was published in 1893, and with it we have the first formulation in America of the theological thought that was brewing in Germany at the close of the century, as a result of the earlier works of Schleiermacher and Frank; thus was the appeal to experience in theology suggested  
22  
for the American mind.

Stearns had the good fortune to give the Ely





Lectures at Union Seminary in 1890, and from these lectures his book is largely written. He chose as his task to develop more clearly what Frank had said, but went further to point out the wealth of apologetic material that there was in the appeal to experience in validating the faith. He started with the fundamental philosophical presuppositions of God and the nature of man, and then went on to show the genesis of a specifically Christian experience to validate these religious concepts. His beginning, as was Frank's, was with the fundamental fact of the new man, the converted man, and the new birth that gave rise to the Christian life. He showed the way in which the Christian develops in this initial experience and the growth of knowledge of Christian truth and doctrines in late experiences. In other words, he attempted to show that the more Christian experience a man had, the more convinced he was of the truth of the Christian doctrines that give rise to his new life. Experience, thereby, translates into certainty the probable knowledge of the truth which the Christian gets from the Bible, authority and other external sources.

Stearns' plan was to go further than his initial statement and show by further illustration the large field of experience that could be drawn from to back up his proposition. Even though this was not possible, his work served an important purpose; he was able to put Christian experience



in its right place and thus correct many of the false ideas that had grown up about it. On the other hand, his work failed to give a scientific basis for the explanation of the Christian experience. Stearns rather sought to show the normal experience, that the Bible and Christian biography suggest. He was successful in this because of his own fine Christian character and because of his deep insight into the experiences of those about whom he read. Even so, we must object to the lack of objectivity and systematization in his work, for herein lay its fundamental weakness.<sup>23</sup> With all his faults, Stearns is the first stepping stone to the rise of American empiricism, and for that reason his work demands a greater consideration.

In his book he begins by saying that it is obviously not sufficient to try to prove the truth of Christianity by the truth of an existing system of doctrines; what men need to know is that Christianity is in the present as real as it was when Jesus walked the earth, that God is acting in the world today as much as he was in times past, and that Christianity as a way of life is a Way of the present, not the past alone. Because of this fact new evidences of Christianity in the present have grown up, and it has been necessary to defend the doctrines against new



heresies. Men have become more scientific, and thus more comprehensive, and their defenses of the faith must be larger in scope than ever before. Now we need apologetics that defend the whole faith at once, not just one doctrine at a time, for the wholeness of it is seen more clearly.<sup>24</sup>

As he puts it, our need is for:

a positive system of proofs adapted to all times and circumstances, by which we may not only meet attacks, but forestall them, and carry the warfare into the enemies' country. (25)

Such a system of apologetics would be made up of several different aspects. Revelation in the Bible would of course play its part, as would continual revelation in the world today. Experiences in the faith, thus present, he says, are the concrete "empirical evidence" for the proof of Christianity in the world as a working force. This proof is further sustained by the individual experience of the power of God in him in the actual act of regeneration and the process of sanctification. This is the evidence of the Christian experience in its truest form; this is what our apologetics, as all true theology, must be built upon.<sup>26</sup>

Stearns maintains that his work is not apologetic alone, and that he would not want anyone to think that defence is all that he has in mind as he writes this book.

---

<sup>24</sup> Stearns, op. cit., p. 18

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 19

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. pp. 20-29





It is true we must defend the faith, and for this defense he relies upon Frank's "conclusions" to a large extent, though not exclusively. He is saying that in the earlier apologetic works the appeal to experience has rarely been made, and that thus the apologetics were weak. Paley and Butler and some few others have mentioned it, but none have used it for its full value in this sort of work. Stearns, following Frank, feels that it holds a unique place in the whole Christian tradition, and that it is his business in his work to prove its importance and its value.<sup>27</sup> (This of course was the conviction of Schleiermacher, though not in the same terms.)

Continuing in another portion, Stearns says that there is no doubt that Christian experience must be given a place in Christian theology, as well as in Christian apologetics, since it is so important. However, it must be corrected by the infallible teachings of revelation, since the Christian experience at best can be that of only a sinful and an imperfect man.<sup>28</sup> Undoubtedly man is imperfect and sinful and the statement of Stearns is correct, but here it would seem is a dilemma that is left unsolved. If the experience is to be checked by the revelation, and if the revelation is checked by the experience, then we are arguing

---

<sup>27</sup> Stearns, op. cit., pp. 30-32

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. pp. 297-298



in a circle. If the experience is to be checked by revelation to an individual then any agreement in theology is impossible; if the experience is to be checked by the revelation to the Church--whatever it may be--then we have the difficulty of agreement in the Church, and the further difficulty of the disparity between the theological formulation and the experience, which we found to be the trouble with Frank. It seems that this is one of the crucial problems for empiricism, that of validating the evidence, and it is at this point that we find these early men unable to formulate a satisfactory answer to their own problem, for surely they must have seen it.

Stearns continues by saying that his task is not to formulate and systematize religious truth, but rather to prove religious fact.<sup>29</sup> This would indicate that he believes that the one without the other is sufficient, but is it? Can we say that the formulation is secondary? True, it comes second in the time process perhaps, though that point too may be debated, but surely it is as important for the understanding of experience to have it formulated as just to note the facts of the situation. Stearns suggests the later observation of William James, that the fact of the experience is as far as we can go in formulating religious

---

29

Stearns, op. cit., p. 298



truth, what the actual doctrines may be is an open question.

On the subject of the Bible, Stearns says that the Christian does not simply transfer the Biblical experiences to his own life, but that after being converted, "born again", he makes these experiences a part of his new life, in a new way, that make them living realities for him. It is not a transfer, but rather a growth that can come only through the personal experience of the individual; he knows the truth of the Bible in a new way, because of his own experience of it, and that is his conviction of its truth.<sup>30</sup> Again there is profound truth in what he says, but again the difficulty of subjectivism makes its appearance. Each person may feel sure of a certain experience in his life drawn from a Biblical experience. But what are the criteria of the truth of the original experience? They cannot be individual alone. It is true that in religion as in art and music, there is a subjective element, but for any sort of concerted religious action, such as that to which empiricism seems to lead, if it is true, there must be more objectivity than we find here. We must say that Stearns is in the first stage, the stage of experience, *per se* and that the validation of that experience in an objective manner must come later, before empiricism can be called in any sense a real "science".

---

30

Stearns, op. cit., pp. 264-266





He does have something to say about validation when he says that the proof of the Christian experience must be handled in much the same way that scientific proof is handled. We know that we have had the experience; we have come into contact with the objects that lead to it; we are certain that the experiences are real and not mere fancy, but the job of verification is yet to be done. It is here that we must transform probable knowledge into real knowledge. He says that the Christian's individual experience, the conversion that brings the new "I", verifies the fact of the religious truth--that it is there, and that it is real.<sup>31</sup> Here again there is great promise as we start to read, but as we progress we find ourselves in the same circle of subjectivism as before. He says that the Christian knows that God must be the cause of his change of life and heart, since he feels God pulsating through him. He claims that in some manner this awareness of God is analogous to sensory perception of objects, only it is the soul that perceives and recognizes in this new experience the active power of God in the new man.<sup>32</sup> (Here we get a definite tinge of Schleiermacher and his idea of "feeling" in theology)

Concluding this section upon the validation of the experience (or rather we should say what he thinks validates the experience, but which for the most part has been

---

<sup>31</sup>

Stearns, op. cit., pp. 208-212

<sup>32</sup>

Ibid. pp. 215; 217



simply an attempt to uphold the traditional dogmas and doctrines of the faith, and to try to show how they fit in- to the experience of the Christian) Stearns says that the last, and the best, proof of the validity of the experience is the universal agreement among men who have had the ex- perience, that they who have been regenerated, and thus had these experiences know what the main facts are: He says:

All I assert is that they (men) are in agreement about the great facts them- selves, and that they give their assent, on the grounds of what they themselves have passed through, to the teachings of the objective revelation, asserting its truth to reality. (33)

We seem to have gone no further than Frank at this point, since the primary conversion must come first, then the faith, as he said, and this seems somewhat turned about for many people. Is this the way it always works? Can we dogmatize here? Is it not more usual to know the faith, then have the experience? To be orthodox, does not the grace of God in the Word come first, the conviction, then the experience of turning, and must we not know the truth in the Word as well before the experience of conversion as after? Can we not "know" and know we know the truth before we turn? Stearns does not seem to see the implications of this point. Then too, we must be careful when we accept as proof of the truth of doctrine, the "consent" of all men; men have been wrong



before. Experience may lead to the acceptance of the doctrine, not because of the experience, but because of a pre-conceived notion that we had before the experience.

In concluding his work, Stearns says that he knows the objections that will be raised--little did he see some of ours today--that the proof which may be good for the Christian will never do for the non-believer. Then he states, and herein he is surely right, that we will never convince others of Christianity by rational proofs and facts if they don't want to believe and that in the end they will be converted and called by the influence of great lives of men, who have had the Christian experience. These non-believers want to know the grounds upon which we accept Christianity, and the validity of our experience; thus our task in calling men to Christ is to show them the evidential value of the life from within--our own experiences reflected in our lives. If we put the Christian experiential evidence to the fore, the inward experience that we have, the other more outward evidences will give strong confirmation to this inward truth. The experimental evidence of Christianity, the experience of men, is of the highest importance and we must realize this fact in our defence of the faith, and the building of new theologies.<sup>34</sup> (Being a conservative at heart Stearns saw little necessity of building up a new theology;

---

34

Stearns, op. cit., pp. 375-377





the old simply needed re-interpreting and defending.)

What can we say of Stearns? Truly he is but a glow, and yet he seems to be moving to a certain point, at least, in the right direction. There is much truth in what he has to say, but, as with Thomas Aquinas, his superstructure ruins what he says concerning an empirical base for theology. He has discussed the verification of the truth, but he has not made it clear how one who is not converted can be sure of the truth; this is a crucial point, and one which later empiricists, or perhaps we should say, real empiricists, try to work out.

The general trend is suggested in his work; the importance of experience is made increasingly clear and that is a step forward. Stearns, at least, sees the central part experience must play in the Christian life; from here on it is no longer a "fad" in theology, but a real point of view to be reckoned with and understood.

## 2

The second of the two men that make up the "Glow" is William Newton Clarke also of New England, also rather conservative, also influenced by Frank and Schleiermacher, and probably influenced by Stearns although there is no external evidence of it. The works of the two men appeared close together, Clarke being somewhat later with his greatest contribution.



Clarke did not have the great range of mind that his forerunner Horace Bushnell did (who also might be considered in this thesis although his direct influence was not so great), but his influence in the field of theology was greater than Bushnell's because of his systematic methods and reasonableness in his writings which have made him one of the most influential forerunners of American liberalism. His reasonableness is not simply that of rationality, but rather of sympathetic understanding and all inclusiveness.<sup>35</sup> G. B. Smith said that Clarke's book on the Outlines of Christian Theology was the most influential book of his day, and perhaps the most influential book of its kind to have been written. It was in this book that he first began to develop the experimental approach to belief which characterized his later writings.<sup>36</sup> (It is interesting to note that it was at this time that Ritschlianism was growing in Germany. This was a parallel, and even like movement; and it is an interesting speculation to wonder how it might have affected empiricism had Ritschl not been quite so violent in his reaction against Schleiermacher.)

As the 19th century was drawing to a close liberalism, as it was then, was in a confused state. The find-

---

35

Wieman and Meland, op. cit., P. 44

36

Ibid. p. 150



ings of modern science had been accepted by many, and yet there were many more who refused to accept them and the more furiously tried to defend all the traditional dogmas of Fundamentalist faith. Stearns' book, although it was important, and good as far as it went, failed to systematize the new theology that was growing to the extent that certain conclusions could be drawn that would help stem the tide of unrest and confusion. It was a move in the right way, but had not accomplished as much as might be hoped. It was with the publishing of Clarke's book, Outlines of Christian Theology, in 1894 that the first clear statement of the new theology was made. The place and importance of the experience of the believer and the value of experience for theology as well as apologetics were set forth in a book that was to be widely read and used in the years to come.<sup>37</sup>

Clarke's own background was both liberal and conservative. Both these strains may be traced in his work. We find the conservative in his emphasis upon the Bible, and the liberal in his insistence on the Christian experience and its centrality for any modern theology. With all the freshness of his work, all its vitality and realism, and its experience centered method, it is still a conservative book, coming from a fairly conservative age. The Bible for the





most part is treated most unhistorically in the light of modern criticism and even in the light of that for his day. This is apparent in his great work and thus detracts to some degree from its lasting value.<sup>38</sup> Our concern is mainly with the first part of the book in which he deals with his principles, his method, and his fundamental presuppositions, which are the foundation stones for his later superstructure.

Clarke maintains, in a quite orthodox manner, that there are two main sources of knowledge, natural knowledge and revealed knowledge, but, (and here he becomes less orthodox) the revealed knowledge has always been in life, in experience, even as we think of natural knowledge today.

Thus he says:

The Christian experience has been the great preserver of the Christian Revelation. The Christian experience is the life individually and collectively, that consists in fellowship with God as Christ reveals Him, and in the fruits of that fellowship. (39)

The theology of the individual Christian is moulded to a large degree by the experiences that he has had; the Christian experiences thus become important if he would know what theology is for him. This continuous experience has kept the Christian revelation a living power in the world. This experience is rejected and suspected by many people,

---

38

Foster, op. cit., pp. 146-148

39

W. N. Clarke, Outlines of Christian Theology, Cambridge, Wilson and Son, 1894, pp. 14-17



but it must have a place in the Christian's life and theology. Even those who reject it as being subjective, use that experience, or one of their own, to cast out another's experience as being worthless; of course this mental act is subjective in their minds, and they do not consciously see the implications of their rejection of experience. Clarke maintains that the Christian experience that is vital is the best interpreter for that specific time, of God and eternal life. The experiential nature of the approach makes it fresh, alive, and real. As progressive experience makes an ever growing church, it is inevitable in any theology.<sup>40</sup>

Again he says that in theology we can know nothing about God and his relations with man, until we first know something about man. Man is the form and image of God, and it is only by knowing him, by seeing the good and the bad that are in him, and thus in all of life, we can truly know what God is like and in some way understand something of what He does in relation to man. History, the experience of others, as well as of ourselves, must be studied if we would know what we are talking about, and if we would do more than idle speculation. Experience and theology cannot be divorced; if they are, sterility in theology is the result.<sup>41</sup>

He continues by saying that theology and philosophy

---

40

Clarke, op. cit., pp. 18-20

41

Ibid., pp. 44-45



are close together since both seek an explanation of the universe, both must and do use the experience man has had with all forms of science and life in general; thus to say the two have no connection is false. Unless theology is concerned with science and the life and experiences of man in general, it becomes detached and unreal in a very perverse sort of way, having no connection with the experiences of man as he lives in the world.<sup>42</sup>

Concerning the study of theology he says:

Specifically should Christian Theology be studied with a mind attuned to the spirit of Christianity. One who would rightly know the science of the Christian religion must rightly know the Christian religion itself; and this can only be done by and through experience. (43)

Theology is thus more than a system of thought on paper, it must be lived. It must be concerned with life, it must not be of the dead past but distinctly and concretely related to the present Christian experience or it is rightly condemned as a dead science.<sup>44</sup> This theology can never be complete enough to satisfy all the questions of men and yet on the other hand it must be more than a fragmentary outline. This is the aim of the book: to show the possible completeness that theology can have now, and the way in which that completeness must relate to experience and life as well as

---

<sup>42</sup> Clarke, op. cit., pp. 48-49

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p. 51

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. pp. 53-54





supernatural revelation.<sup>45</sup> Here is a conservative point; as with Stearns, he will attempt to show that the traditional dogmas of the faith--all of them--can fit into modern experience. This seems to be a most difficult task at best, and perhaps not the most profitable point of departure for an empirical approach.

We may sum up our consideration of Clarke in this work. His book, while most important, failed to make the contribution it should have made. Clarke tried too hard to make the liberal and the conservative wings of Christianity come together in his book and failed. His emphasis should have been on one side or the other since the two divergent strands were impossible to unite at that time. The book tried to cover too much material, and systematize too much material from the experiential point of view, for one man to cover adequately. The scope of his work suggested the need for more cooperative effort. Clarke's initial idea was fine, his method on the whole was sound, and the results should have been more encouraging than they were, but he, like Stearns, did not develop his argument from his first premises enough to clinch and master it for the empirical point of view.<sup>46</sup>

Another contribution of Clarke to this field may be found in his book, What Shall We Think of Christianity?

---

45

Clarke, op. cit., pp. 57-58

46

Foster, op. cit., pp. 149-152



which was published in 1899, and which were lectures given at Johns Hopkins University. The title of the book suggests that its nature is not entirely within the field of our study, but within the book he makes some interesting observations that concern our subject. He says the Christian people:

.....are called to perceive that they are living in a new age; to believe in the validity of all the facts and to be willing to go where facts may lead; to accept reconstructions; to let knowledge in, well assured that it will not drive faith out; to be as free with knowledge as they are with faith. (47)

He feels many people are not opening their minds to the new knowledge that is in the world, they refuse to expand their faith to take in the new, and for that reason they will lose their faith in the end. His plea is for an open mind to new spiritual truths, to avoid dogmatism and narrowness, that the true faith may be known and appreciated by all men.<sup>48</sup> This statement certainly fits in with the attitude of mind that we expect the empiricists to have, and perhaps this is the best statement he makes of it anywhere. Certainly this book shows development in his thought from the former.

He then turns to a discussion of the growth of doctrine, and after refuting the notion that Jesus, or the Councils, formulated it in abstractio, he says:

---

47

W. N. Clarke, What Shall We Think of Christianity?, N.Y.: Scribners, 1899, pp. 36-37 (A very fine book for prophetic reading for today as well as then.)

48

Ibid., pp. 39-47



.....doctrine grew as a vital thing,  
and grew in the soil of life. The  
Christian doctrine sprang up in the ex-  
perience of Christian living. Truth and  
experience were essential to the pro-  
ducing of it, neither alone was enough. (49)

The truth may be heard, but only as it is incorporated into  
life does it become real for the individual. There is no  
true doctrine unless it comes in this manner.

The contribution of Jesus to mankind be-  
came doctrine in His church by passing  
through the experience to which it gave  
rise in men, and coming out in the form  
which that experience gave to it.

Doctrine is thus impossible apart from life, for in life is  
its beginning of reality for men.<sup>50</sup>

He then discusses what he feels will be the new  
impetus to doctrine. This impetus will come from two sources,  
one is clear and straightforward thinking in the new age  
that is being born, and the other is the actual experience  
of the Christian people, not as they experience the doctrines,  
but as they experience the truths that those doctrines try  
to relate, imperfectly to be sure. This experience will in-  
sist upon the genuine reality of religion, not upon the out-  
ward forms alone; it is thus of the greatest import in con-  
sidering the truth of doctrine.<sup>51</sup> Still we wonder where the  
objective criteria of the truth are to be found, and with  
that point Clarke does not seem to deal in any way. He does

---

49

Clarke, op. cit., pp. 51-52

50

Ibid., p. 54





recognize the prime place of experience, even more so than Stearns in the formation of doctrine.

Through the experience of power the Christian doctrine was born. This Christian power is abroad today; it is not an abstract non-entity; but it is, on the other hand, not true for the individual until he feels it to be true and experiences it in his own life.

When the truth that Jesus imparted to his friends came to be felt as truth, and influential in the realm of affections, then it came to have power, and only then. (52)

Clarke admits that feeling that a thing is true is not the proof that it is true, and yet he says are we to say that when feeling is absent truth is there? It is most certainly true that where there is truth there is a feeling of certainty accompanying it. The fallibility of feeling as a proof of truth must be recognized, and at the same time we must recognize the fact that feeling may be, and often is, one of the confirmations of the truth of Christianity.<sup>52</sup> This is a bit thick, I realize, but his apparent use of Schleiermacher's method is certainly not entirely wrong.

Clarke concludes his discussion by saying that Christian doctrine rests in the truth that the Christian

---

52

Clarke, op. cit., pp. 101; 130-131

53

Ibid., pp. 137-138



people possess in the common Christian experience; its power is in reality and in their sense of its reality.<sup>54</sup>

Clarke's work would then, in summary, seem to carry further the idea of Christian experience, not only as we gather it in books and from the lives of those gone before, as Stearns suggested, but in living men today. Even with this important step, he has not cleared the main hurdle, the criteria of truth or experience for the empiricist. He admits the subjectivity of his approach, but does not point a way out of it. The emphasis upon feeling reminds us of Schleiermacher more than of Stearns and in this sense, there seems to be a loss of objectivity in his approach. However, Clarke did make an advance; he brought home the necessity of seeing doctrine as a living thing in the experiential world and not something that is found in the world of abstractions alone; for this we must thank him, for it is a memorable contribution in any approach to an empirical theology.

The "glow" is started. To try to find any direct connection between the works of Stearns and James will be difficult, and perhaps impossible. James, the first real empiricist, coming out of the soil which Clarke and Stearns

---

54

Clarke, op. cit., pp. 148-149



helped to create, could not help but be influenced by them. At least, we will see that his work did carry on in spirit, and to some extent in method, that which was started by the two men we have considered. Thus with these works in mind we turn to a consideration of William James and his contributions to this field of religious empiricism.





CHAPTER III

WILLIAM JAMES AND THE EMPIRICAL METHOD



## CHAPTER III

## WILLIAM JAMES AND THE EMPIRICAL METHOD

## 1

The interest of the men writing in the late 19th century was mainly that of the psychology of religion, and more specifically the psychology of conversion to something, most usually the Christian faith. The chief method of men such as James, Starbuck and Leuba, was that of the questionnaire. This method looked into the feelings of men, their acts as a result of these feelings, and their various experiences related to their "conversions", and made up of the data that was largely dealt with in this period.<sup>55</sup>

William James was the product of many minds and thoughts. As we have said, it is difficult to trace his direct connection with Stearns and with Clarke, but his most decided influence may be seen in the English writer, A. J. Balfour. This man exerted more influence on James than did the German theologians who had influenced the men we have discussed in our former chapter. James was always skeptical of the Germans, and was uncongenial mentally with their thoughts for the most part. Balfour wrote a book entitled Foundations of Belief, from which James drew many of his

---

<sup>55</sup> H. N. Wieman and W. M. Horton, The Growth of Religion, Chicago; Willett, Clark and Co., 1936, p. 218



ideas, and whose author he praised liberally. This book, James said in a letter to his brother, did away with the technicalities of religion, and dealt with the fundamentals, the real things, and the important things of the religious life of man. The book was not too subtle and not too closely reasoned, but its broad sweep caught fire with James. Balfour defended the thesis that unbelief is untenable for living, and that religious belief and scientific belief are much alike, that we feel the need for science quite in the same way that we feel the need for religion, depending of course on personal interests, and that this feeling of need in a sense helps to validate the data we are dealing with. There is, then, a practical need for religion, as there is for science, and even though the argument was subjective, in its essence it appealed to James and we find its influence most strongly in The Will to Believe.<sup>56</sup>

James was neither a modernist nor a humanist. There is a strong supernatural flavour in his writings, practical and down to earth though they be. He always thought that the supernatural was morally significant, and intellectually justifiable. Thus his contribution in his Will to Believe is most significant in validating this position he held, in sustaining the logical legitimacy of religious faith (of a

---

<sup>56</sup>

D. C. Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, N.Y.: Harpers, 1940, pp. 307-310





kind, to be sure). But this supernatural characteristic should not lead us to say James is an a priorist--nor an absolutist. For him supreme value may change from age to age, in the light of the dominant interests of the age or the individual.<sup>57</sup>

In spite of the fact that James did not have a profound respect for many of the German philosophers, he was actually following after Kant when he said that we should not wait for all the rational arguments, all the evidence to be in, to prove the truth of faith before we are willing to believe. Rather, he thought we should will to believe whatever seemed morally best to believe and then see whether the consequences of such a faith did not justify such a venture.<sup>58</sup> This is a bald statement, and it is at this point that we shall go to the actual writings of James to find out what he was talking about, and in finding the answer to this question we shall see where empiricism enters into his thought.

## 2

The first work that we must consider is the essay The Will to Believe, which was published in a volume of the

---

57

E. A. Burtt, Types of Religious Philosophy, N.Y.: Harpers, 1939, p. 410

58

Wieman and Horton, op. cit., p. 209



same name in 1897. This is the earliest work of James that we shall study, and shows most directly the influence of Balfour upon his thought. In considering this essay we must keep in mind that James is not writing as a theologian, as the other men we have studied were; he is a philosopher, and for that reason we shall find his approach quite different from that of Stearns and Clarke. The way may seem involved at times, but our conclusions, it is hoped, will have made the way worth traveling.

The aim of the essay is an attempt to show that man has a right to adopt a believing attitude on other than just rational and logical grounds.<sup>59</sup> (Before "all" the evidence is in) The discussion centers around the various hypotheses by which we live. There are many of these hypotheses, or options as James calls them, that we can utilize. These options may be of several kinds; they may be living or dead, forced or avoidable, momentous or trivial. For us, a genuine option, one we will work with and adapt into our lives, is one that is alive, forced, and momentous. For our decision in the matter will determine something of the resulting action after being confronted with this truth, or apparent truth in hypothetical form.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> William James, Selected Papers on Philosophy, N.Y.: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1917, The Will to Believe, p. 100

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. pp. 100-102



Thus whatever we may say of our decisions regarding these options, it is certain that our non-intellectual natures do to some extent fashion our beliefs, for an option is seen in its practical as well as theoretical implications. James quotes from history, from the lives of men who have been confronted with options that were not intellectually ascertainable to sustain his position that the decisions made were of utmost importance. Pure insight and logic alone do not produce belief; there are things that come before and after our decisions in our volitional natures that have a great deal to do with what we believe and these factors cannot be disregarded. Thus James defends his theses in this manner:

Our passional natures not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, 'do not decide, but leave the question open', is itself a passional decision.....just like deciding yes or no.....and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth. (61)

James goes on to discuss the two current ways of knowing, the absolutist way and the empirical way. The absolutist says that we can know when we have attained to knowing truth, while empiricists on the other hand say

---

61

James, Selected Papers in Philosophy, op. cit. pp. 107-108





that though we can attain truth, we will not necessarily know when we have it infallibly and in a strict intellectual manner. Thus empiricism as a method is not dogmatic and closed, but open to correction and new truth all the time. We are, James says, all absolutists by instinct, but we can be more empirical if we recall the successes of the sciences and how they have worked with rigid empiricism, and inculcate some of this spirit into our philosophy and our religion as well.<sup>62</sup>

He then confesses his own point of view in this matter, and we quote for its importance in moulding what he says in this essay and in later works:

I am, therefore, myself a complete empiricist so far as my theory of human knowledge goes. I live, to be sure, by the practical faith that we must go on experiencing and thinking over our experiences, for only thus can our opinions grow more true..... (63)

But to continue, when we give up the doctrine and idea of gaining immediate objective certitude before we act, we are not giving up the quest for truth, or the hope that there is truth to be found. While the scholastic pins his hopes on starting principles as the determiner of his truth, the empiricist pins his hopes on the upshot, the

---

<sup>62</sup> James, Selected Papers in Philosophy, op. cit. pp 108-110

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 110



final end, as being the validation of the truth that he seeks; thus where we start makes no difference, hypotheses may come from anywhere, for it is the end result that determines the truth of the hypothesis.<sup>64</sup>

The rest of the essay is devoted to a vindication of the "liveliness" of the religious option, and the importance of the will in the whole matter. James points out that disbelief is really a much worse state than belief, even though the evidence is not all in, even from a purely negative logical point of view, which is intellectually centered. What we have seen is that experience becomes a real factor in his method, not just something we talk about and forget, for him it becomes the validation of truth. Experience is the "proof of the pudding", and thus the "stuff" of any real theology if it is to be related to life.

He concludes the essay by saying that if we will be empiricists in religion, as we are in daily life, then we cannot wait until all the evidence is in to commit ourselves to faith; it is foolish to wait, for we will never know when "all" the evidence is in for us. It is not a static idea; we must be prepared to act on the evidence we have, to commit ourselves in will, and the results of

---

64

James, op. cit., pp. 112-113



that committal, if sincere, based on what we do know, will validate to some measure its truth for us.<sup>65</sup>

Largely this essay seems to be calling for a certain attitude toward religious truth and faith. This attitude we may take to represent the empirical attitude of approach to truth, the "strong-man" approach that deals with reality and life. James points out that this belief he calls for is not always intellectually ascertainable in the same sense of scientific belief, but by showing the negative side of the picture--what it is like with no belief--he claims that belief has the better right to men's wills. This provides a very wide base for any religious empiricism; perhaps it is too wide. We do need some tests of truth before action, to at least give us some direction; validation always in experience and action is a somewhat dangerous idea if carried too far. There seems to be a lack of recognition of other factors in what James suggests, but the methodology he describes is the sort of thing that is more or less congenial to empiricism as we understand it. It is indeed true that the final outcome of any belief carried into life, as well as the initial starting hypothesis, has importance for us in religious living, in religious validation of truth.

---

65

James, op. cit., p. 123





## 3

The next work of James which shows us something of his religious empiricism is his Varieties of Religious Experience which make up the Gifford Lectures for the year 1901-1902. In this work he deals specifically with the religious phenomena of life, the appearances they take in men, and something of what they are. Much of the book is taken up with illustrative cases of people who have had certain religious experiences and their reactions to them. We shall not deal with specific cases, rather looking throughout for an indication of method, and the general principles of the empirical approach. The book as a whole has a strong mystical flavour; this one must keep in mind when he reads James, to balance his more hard-headed empirical pragmatism.

He defines religion as:

The feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the Divine. (66)

In this definition we see that James is concerned with the experience individual men may have. These experiences are not in systematic form when we read of them in this book, but from them James draws certain conclusions. These conclusions, which are statements of principles are to be found throughout the book.



He begins by discussing what is most necessary, a theory of knowledge or truth. We cannot say that to find the origins of a truth in some things is any adequate theory of the truth, it is too molecular; the most adequate method of finding religious truth is the way the supposed truth acts upon the whole of a man's religious life. This, he says, is the empirical criterion of truth, and even the ultimate criterion for the supernaturalists, because even they have to take into account the effect of a "truth" on the whole of man.<sup>67</sup> However, the aim of this book is not with institutional religion in the sense of set systems of theology and the church, but with personal religion. Here he says that he believes that there is no single religious emotion, even as there is no specific religious object or act;<sup>68</sup> certainly this can only mean personal religion since there are acts and objects of a specific type in the church. We find that this is a broad statement, and widens the base of his empirical approach to include much more than perhaps Clarke in his empiricism would allow.

James, in keeping with the above, defines the Divine in this manner:

The Divine shall mean for us only such a primal reality as the individual feels impelled to respond to solemnly and gravely, neither by a curse nor a jest. (69)

---

<sup>67</sup>James, op. cit., pp. 19-20

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., pp. 28-29



Rationalism cannot establish any kind of belief, at least not one that will fit into the broad definitions that we have here, for rationalism essentially deals with that part of life that is superficial, which can be appealed to by proofs, by logic, by the traditional proofs for God--a God that we no longer believe in and an out-of-date idea. No, religion must be proved, if proof is what we wish, on the experiential level; it must be seen in all of life, otherwise there is nothing in it that goes below the surface. Rationalism in its superficiality may be correct if we refuse to turn to real life to see what we can find there.<sup>70</sup>

Besides the superficiality of rationalism, it is impossible to divide man up into compartments--his animal nature in one, and his rational nature in another. In the same way, religion cannot be divided up so that the natural is on one side and the supernatural on another; we cannot look at the two in this disjointed fashion. Religion, as man, must be seen as a whole, and the fruits of this wholeness are the validation of its reality. Through history one might make out a case for animal or human sacrifice in religion, since once they were an integral part of it, but today this sort of thing is out of the picture, its value for us is nihil. James says:

---

<sup>70</sup>

James, op. cit. (VRE) pp. 73-74





Common sense prejudices and instincts  
are themselves the fruit of an em-  
pirical evolution.

Thus what was once good may no longer be good in the light of the experience of man. From this we are not to conclude that the whole of religion is bad; this is but one part. Seen as a whole religion is good; seen partially, perhaps we do wonder. These aspects must be taken into account since they do help to formulate what we believe. Some kinds of theology are built upon a parts system such as we have suggested, but usually as man's ideas change with the climate of his environment, so his theological thinking changes also.<sup>71</sup>

By the empirical method we are compelled to throw out those things that stand athwart the voice of man's experience. We must judge all religions and gods in the light of human experience and advance, and for this we have to have some standard of theological probability of our own.

Experience, if we take it in its largest sense, is thus the parent of those disbeliefs which, it was charged, were inconsistent with the experimental method.(72)

If we take a more positive approach and see the more positive beliefs of man, even here, logical consistency forces us to keep in mind that the religion we stand by, is the religion,

---

<sup>71</sup> James, op. cit., pp. 327-328

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 330-331



and gods we need and can use; thus experience can be used as both negative proof against, and positive proof for the positions we take on religious grounds. It is true, James says, that the empirical method may be criticized for vagueness and subjectivity, but this is a criticism to which the whole life of man in dealing with religious matters is open, and not just the empirical man. External certainty has never upheld a religion for all times for there is always the subjective element.<sup>72</sup> In this way he protects himself from the criticism that he knows will come, by admitting ahead of time the fault of his method, as well as seeing the same fault in others.

We come to the last chapter in the book in which he sums up and draws conclusions based on the principles and the cases discussed. All conclusions must be spiritual judgments based on an appreciation of the significance of the religious life taken as a whole and not in little parts.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, the conclusions that we often draw are not correlative to what the actual life situation of religion is; that is, what we say religion is in our books, is not always what we find it to be when we look to the experiences of men. For this reason James says that it is the religion

---

<sup>72</sup> James, op. cit., pp. 330-331

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 485





as found in men we must study, not that in books. This is study of experience. If we try to study religion from the point of view that we study science, in all its vastness and immensity, religion becomes shallow and thin. It is only when we study it in the personal phenomena, as it is found in men, that we come to terms with rich reality.<sup>74</sup>

If our personal religion is to be real it must in a sense be egoistic; there is no reality in space and in the larger cosmic factors until they relate to the individual's experience as far as religion is concerned.

Individuality is found in feeling; and the recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done. (75)

He then reduces religion to its lowest admissible terms by all men, because it is here we can start in the experiential world. He recognizes that this makes for a paltry base, but one that men can agree upon and one that can become a foundation stone upon which certain "overbeliefs" can be erected. This he feels is essential if we are to be realistic in our thinking. Feelings are found to be the same in all religions. Thoughts and theories deduced from the initial feelings may differ, but the feelings remain a base that we

---

<sup>74</sup>James, op. cit., pp. 488-490; 498

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., pp. 501-502





can build upon in experience. This feeling may not even be concerned with the objective reality of God or religion itself, but may simply be a utilitarian concept of what God is for our use. This is subjective and exceedingly utilitarian, but it is only the first step and we need not stop here, says James. Even in all the discrepancies of creeds, there is still a nucleus beneath that is real, e. g. the need for salvation, the sense of wrongness or sin, which can only be changed by religion. Can we consider this feeling more than a feeling? Can we consider it objectively, as well as subjectively? Is there any assurance that we are not simply fooling ourselves? All religions seem to consider this MORE, or this God, or gods true; there is consent from mankind! The trouble arises because it is about this MORE, this God, that the discrepant theories grow--both in dogmas and in doctrines. Is there any mediating ground where all may come together in speaking of this reality, assuming it to be true?<sup>76</sup>

James then tries to formulate what he thinks this MORE, this God, may be without putting in the "overbeliefs" of any particular doctrines of faith. He says that we find a conscious person is continuous with a wider self through which some kind of saving experiences come; this wider self

---

76

James, op. cit., pp. 504-511



or The MORE is known in the same way the subconscious is known; we know the subconscious is there, through experience, though at all waking hours we are not vitally aware of it. He says this wider self, this MORE is:

A positive content of religious experience which.....is literally and objectively true as far as it goes. (77)

From here James goes into a discussion of his own "overbeliefs", which he admits are his, even as another person will perhaps have a different set. (Orthodox Christianity may be "overbelief" in its theology) What he has said so far is the base one can build on, and it is as far as we can go as a unified mankind as to religious experience. This base, he claims, is empirically provable, and is thus in keeping with his whole line of approach.

James' own specific "overbeliefs" would call the MORE, "God", and he is convinced that this overbelief being set up we can deduce another, namely, that God is ruler. This is, he says, pragmatic religion because it creates new facts to be verified in experience. It claims as its realm a specific one, one of overbeliefs which give to religion body and soul, and not just empty metaphysical speculations which James hates.<sup>78</sup>

---

77

James, op. cit., pp. 511-515

78

Ibid., pp. 518-519



This is his religious empiricism; it is limited in a sense, and in another it is broad. It opens to us a new world of overbeliefs for verification, overbeliefs which he says demand our faith. Being committed to them, not in an irrational manner alone, but conscious that they are overbeliefs, we help God become more effective in his tasks of great moment in the world of men.<sup>79</sup> It is a challenging empiricism, one that makes man feel he has something to say in life and in the world. It is a religious empiricism that appeals to man's pragmatic nature. We must be careful not to be swept off our feet by James, and before drawing more conclusions look again at another of his works that is upon this pragmatism of which we have been speaking. We may even say that this consideration of pragmatism is a "live option" for us before we can decide where James leaves us in this discussion of the history of empiricism.

## 4

The third work of James that we shall consider is his book Pragmatism, which is made up from the lectures he delivered at the Lowell Institute in Boston, November and December 1906. It is thus the latest work of his we shall discuss. The chapter to which we shall refer is entitled "Pragmatism and Religion".

---

79

James, op. cit., p. 519





He begins by saying that with the pragmatic principle in mind we cannot reject any hypothesis that has useful consequences for life flowing from it. If these principles or hypotheses have use, if they measure up with other truths of life, then their meaning will most probably be true.<sup>80</sup>

James then discusses the controversy between rationalistic and empirical religion, by saying that their major clash is in the realm of the validity of possibility. It is necessary to make clear the meaning of possibility first. What does it mean when we say, for instance, that salvation is a possibility? It simply means that some of the possibilities for salvation exist, and that the fewer preventing possibilities we can find, the more possible salvation is, and thus the more probable deliverance is. From this we may say that there are two ways of looking at the world, the pessimistic way, which says there is no salvation, or the optimistic way which says that salvation is inevitable. James says there is yet a third way, the middle way, which he calls meliorism. He feels it is the only way to look at salvation pragmatically. Meliorism says that salvation is neither impossible nor inevitable, but that it is a possibility that becomes more probable as the conditions

---

80

William James, Pragmatism, N. Y.: Longmans Green and Co., 1907, p. 273



of salvation become more numerous. Pragmatism must make its stand here, since there is something to be said on both sides of the fence from the point of view of the empirical evidence.<sup>81</sup> Empiricism is the method that leads to this belief, obviously, since in collecting its data it cannot say dogmatically there is, or there is not salvation from a preconceived notion.

That we have a part in this salvation is apparent since our acts are not unrealities, and since what we do helps to create the conditions for salvation, thus making them more numerous in the world. From the point of view of pragmatism, salvation becomes more than a possibility, according to how men act upon their cherished hopes and ideals in relation to the world. If we want certain things to be, we must do something to bring them about. This is true in the realm of religion as well as in the realm of daily bread. There is, he admits, an irrational note here that conflicts with rational religion. There all is nice and neat and systematized and in accordance with our wishes of a perfect system, but these wishes, idle ones, are stark unreality.<sup>82</sup>

This is tough-minded religion, this is the kind of religion of pluralism, which says that each man has a part to do, in religion as in other things. If he does it, he is

---

81

James, Pragmatism, op. cit., pp. 282; 284-286

82

Ibid., pp. 287-290



helping to create the fact of his belief. It is in fundamental contrast to the religion of the tender-minded, the absolutists, who pin their faith on rest in God with the belief that he will do their part without their having anything to do. These tender-minded are the ones who refuse the challenge of life, and would rather lose themselves in some kind of eternity. The contrast between empirical and unempirical religion is most evident at this point. Perhaps, says James, some would not call this pluralism a religion, but instead a moralism, preferring to call only the absolutists the religious people. Since this delineation would make the definition of religion simply self-surrender, James objects to it. In these two ideas of religion, he sees a fundamental and far reaching conflict that he personally cannot solve for the world.<sup>83</sup>

James feels that we must have a part in the struggle of the world and that unless we do religion is of no account. The saccharine sweetness of the absolutists is too much for him; possibility is not there in a real sense as it is in pragmatic religion where the human factor always plays a dominant part. The universe is dangerous but it offers countless possibilities, and with those possibilities are always the dangers of losing the battle. Thus when we accept





the challenge in the light of the many possibilities, good and bad, we are genuine pragmatists. The pragmatist is willing to live by the scheme of possibilities, not certified sureties. Even in this challenge, if man accepts it, he has more than just his fellows to aid him. James makes clear that pragmatism does NOT RULE THE SUPERHUMAN OUT. The absolutists' God is out, yes, but not God more generally defined:

On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true. (84)

Experience has shown that this hypothesis does work. Here is where empiricism enters the picture again, for it validates faith in pragmatism for James, by its appeal to experience. Perhaps this may go a little too far for some of us, but we gather the importance and the central place of experience in his work by these statements, and that is what we want to stress. It is our job, he continues, to build this idea of God so that it fits with other truths that work; this, then, is theology for the pragmatist.<sup>84</sup>

James says that he does not believe that mere human experience is the highest form but that we stand in relation to the universe much as the animal world of our pets stands in relation to us:



They inhabit our drawing rooms and libraries. They take part in scenes of whose significance they have no inkling. They are merely tangent to the curves of history the beginnings and ends and forms of which pass wholly beyond their ken. So are we tangent to the wider things in life. But, just as many of the dog's and cat's ideals coincide with our ideals, and the dogs and cats have daily living proof of the fact, so we may well believe, on the proofs that religious experience affords, that higher powers exist and are at work to save the world on ideal lines similar to our own. (85)

Thus can pragmatism be called religion, if that religion can be pluralistic or melioristic. Pragmatism cannot be dogmatic, for we do not have all the evidence to know just exactly what is best as yet. Overbeliefs and ventures in faith are needed before the evidence from experience will in any sense be complete. So he concludes that between the crude naturalism and the transcendental absolutism stands pragmatic religion, the religion of the tough minded, the religion that goes to experience for its data, the religion that does not close dogmatic doors, because all the evidence from overbeliefs and adventures in faith is not yet in.<sup>86</sup>

There is little need for comment; the reader can quickly see both the religious content in what James is saying and the intense demand for experience and open-mindedness,

---

85

James, op. cit., p. 300

86

Ibid., p. 301



the requisites of empiricism, in this field.

5

Let us now make some general statements about James and draw together the strands that have perhaps been left too much at loose ends. In his work we find two main strands of religious thinking that have colored the religious thought of the present day and very directly influence our specific study. These two strands are not by any means the only two in religious thinking today, but they are two of importance. There is the empirical strand coming from his Varieties of Religious Experience, and the pragmatic strand based upon the type of experience needed, found in his Will to Believe and Pragmatism.<sup>87</sup> These have already been shown and discussed.

As we have seen the identification of pluralism with pragmatism and empiricism is easily evident. Empiricism offers religious philosophy much, not in the line of passivity, but in the line of actively asserting the power of faith in the world.

Radical empiricism in its turn finds a place in a philosophy of religion through its requirement that good and

---

87

Julius Seelye Bixler, Religion in the Philosophy of William James, N. Y.: Marshall Jones and Co., 1926, Intro. p. viii





evil be clearly distinguished, that the relations between the two be external; and in the second place by requiring that relations be empirically known. (88)

Pragmatism is fundamentally an attitude, pluralism is a description, and empiricism is a method of approach for James. Empiricism is the most open to abuse, says Bixler, in that if we try to justify all abnormal and normal experiences we shall indeed have chaos on our hands. It is when the method is used in its wider sense, as experimentally testing data, not mere logic, that it becomes the most useful of methods in learning about God, for surely the tightly reasoned and deductive logical methods are open to all the criticism of dogmatic and "certain" religions.<sup>89</sup> This wider sense of the use of the term, empiricism, is what Bixler believes James had in mind, and we must agree, for when it is looked at in this way it is far more inclusive than the subjectivism of Stearns and Clarke; it offers objectivity in the search for truth, and a criterion of that search.

Thus Bixler says, that if we agree that religious truth must in a large measure deal with the probable, then with empiricism as a method, pragmatism as a test, and the will to believe, we have the equipment for finding religious

---

88

Bixler, op. cit., pp. 215-216

89

Ibid., p. 216



truth, and James' statement of the reason for the will to believe in religious truth must hold good for us. James' insistence that the issues we decide are true and real, must be live ones for us, rules out the mere subjective wish. When a religious experience brings certain moral goods for our life, we are justified in claiming that pragmatic empiricism points to God as being the cause of that religious experience.<sup>90</sup>

Bixler also sees, and realizes, the highly mystical ideas in James, and that they are important for his work. In many ways certain mystical experiences make up much of his "proof" in the Varieties of Religious Experience, but even allowing for this, James' own hard-headedness, his close though sweeping reasoning, and his general approach do not allow us to cast all aside because there is a mystical touch in certain areas.

There are certain criticisms that we must level against James, and in so doing we will follow Macintosh largely for his keen insight into the difficulties of a man who becomes such fascinating reading that it is hard to criticize his works.

James, Macintosh says, has a dualistic epistemology which makes impossible any experiential access to the knowl-



edge of God. There is no logical verification in his work, and all we can do is rely on the "feeling" that seems best to us. The feeling alone can never be a verification, and especially not when one is tied up in a dualistic epistemology. What empiricism really needs, says Macintosh, next to experience, is an adequate theory of knowledge that will enable us to have full verification of at least some religious hypothesis, or at least know that it is a possibility, not only for the here and now, but on the right religious adjustment always, everywhere, and for all people. This, James does not seem to see, or at least he does not come to grips with it.<sup>91</sup>

The dualism of James' epistemology leads to agnosticism in the long run, and thus he forfeits any chance of a real and scientific empirical theology, built from his work. Macintosh does not like his mysticism, and uses it in his criticism of his work as forming illogical ground to build upon. James was concerned less with the empirical and more with the transcendental when he talked about the verification of the "live option", and the only way he could have escaped to what he wanted to talk about was by adapting a new theory of knowledge; critical monistic realism is what Macintosh suggests might have helped him out.<sup>92</sup>

---

91

Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, op. cit., p. 313

92

Ibid., p. 314 (It should be noted that not all empiricists would admit, as does Macintosh, that dualism ultimately leads to agnosticism. Cf. R. C. Miller, Personalist, Winter, 1940.





A further criticism is that concerning just what religious ideas ought one to believe on pragmatic grounds. The whole idea of the theory of verification is too lightly dealt with and thus leads one to the position of thinking that the Will to Believe might just as easily be called the Will to Make Believe as Urban suggested it might be. Macintosh concludes that the trouble with religious pragmatism is that it tries to make others believe, rather than verifying itself upon a satisfactory and firm base.<sup>93A</sup>

Macintosh is not easy on James, perhaps a little too hard from our point of view, but he does see the fundamental weakness--the lack of verification--and more than that he sees the reason for this weakness in the epistemological set-up. James would probably try to defend himself were he able. From his style and manner one could conclude that he would put up a pretty good fight.

Several other criticisms might be made. One is his type of naturalism. Though James SPECIFICALLY DID NOT RULE OUT THE DIVINE, there is a FEEELING that God plays a secondary role in his writings,<sup>93B</sup> that the big, tough-minded man could handle himself and make decisions very well without God. The mystical side tends to counteract this feeling

---

93A

Macintosh, op. cit., p. 314

93B

There is some difference of opinion upon this point, although it is slight. Cf. Bixler, op. cit.



to some extent, but even so one feels in his more concrete sections James does not get out of the naturalistic sphere enough, perhaps for fear of the absolutists whom he intensely disliked. Again he does not see the necessity of metaphysics, (in a system) and the formulation of truths into some kind of a system. Both of these things we would say are necessary, and though perhaps his empiricism was good as far as it went, he too lightly pulls down, and tells us to rebuild. It is interesting to note along this line that both Stearns and Clarke attempted to keep the traditional structures of theology, and simply to validate them by man's experience. James on the other hand tears it all down, and then appeals to experience to see what can be found out about religious truth. The approach is fundamentally different, due perhaps to temperament, impatience, and the dawning of a new religious science. Such are the incidental phenomena of history and approach that make it difficult to trace this study in a straight upward direction. Even as the line of human history is jagged, so here we find a broken and rough line that seems to find its roots in many places all at once, and makes new jogs and breaks with each man we study.

We have criticized James, and yet throughout we have attempted to show his good points. Whatever we can say, he certainly made a contribution to this field, perhaps as



much as any other one man considering his date and his approach. Now in conclusion let us summarize his importance for today in religion and in empiricism, for so far this chapter has hardly done justice to the magnanimity of this great man in more than just the empirical field.

No matter how we criticize the man, no matter whether we can accept his overbeliefs as our own or not, we must say that his religious attitude is appealing to man today. The empirical approach is appealing because it is analogous to the approach of science, with which approach men today have grown up. Men are acquainted with experiments and the need for experience in finding truth, and this James does emphasize in his philosophy as well as in his religion. Men today have seen so much that generations before them did not dream of that they cannot be dogmatic about final truth; they are naturally open minded. (?) (If they are honest)

In the second place, James' pluralism appeals to people because the wars we have seen point out more than ever that the irrational, the evil, the sin that is in the world cannot be brushed aside to create a rational system. Irrationalities that are painted over when we think in absolutist terms of a completely rational universe at all times, are at least noticed and often are explained by pluralism.

In the third place, pragmatism appeals to men to-





day because it is a creative faith. James believed in the creative, the active individual, and in a world of new and enlarged possibilities such as we are learning about today. Creative faith is something that we can not only see, but something we want, for we see in it great value for men. The God of this new religion, this creative faith, will be for us as he was for James, a God of glory, but more than that a God whose energies and powers are needed by man on earth, and are of such value that man is called to new beliefs and newer and better actions on those beliefs.<sup>94</sup>

Perhaps Bixler is a little romantic in the above, but the essence of what he says is the essence of the kind of faith empiricism seeks for man. Not only do we see in this what James has done and his influence, but we see the salient points that modern empiricism must take into account to fit modern man. Modern empiricism seeks to bring God close to man, to release him from a past that does not make sense today. If it is truly religious it will seek to bring men closer to God by its new insights into the nature of God and what His will is for men, based on their knowledge of him.

William James was truly the first real American empiricist even with all his faults, his contribution was

---

<sup>94</sup> Bixler, op. cit., pp. 217-218 (For this concluding argument I am indebted)



great, his advance in the field was memorable, and as both man and writer he made an impression upon American philosophy and the philosopher of religion that few men have made.



## CONCLUSION TO PART I

We have traced our study from the Continent, from Schleiermacher, and his emphasis upon feeling, to Frank whose emphasis upon the religious experience validates his theological system. Then we crossed the water and with L. F. Stearns we saw the American interpretation of the German idea of validation of theology in experience. In W. N. Clarke we turned a new page, in trying to get a more objective point of view, a more complete analysis of the truth of the faith, with the possibility implied of perhaps changing some of the formularies if they did not come out clearly in experience. Then we took a radical step; we saw in the thought of William James the complete overthrowing of the traditional theologies with a complete appeal to experience to validate truth and religion; and with a new base, build our overbeliefs. We saw a new concept of God, which implied a more active and cooperative doctrine of man in the process of the world. We were introduced to pragmatism in validating truth, and pluralism as an explanation, indeed rough, of the universe, to the complete overthrowing of old absolutists and rationalistic theories. At this point we have closed this part of our thesis.





There is still much to be done. We have attained a certain degree of objectivity in James, but more is desirable, also we would like a more adequate theory of knowledge than he advocated. The world or realm of overbeliefs needs to be more critically worked out to see what is valid upon an empirical base, how far we can go, and where the line for new deductions and inductions, from our base must be drawn.

Experience has been somewhat systematized; it has more meaning for us in James than it did in Schleiermacher, but still there is further need to limit the field and to find objective criteria for valid experiences in the religious realm. We have discussed some of the tests of belief and truth, but none is adequate. In the next period we shall see progress made along the above lines.

James has caught us up in the enthusiasm of pragmatism, and yet we have seen that it argues in a direction that we must be very careful in following, because sometimes errors work as well as truth. More critical work is needed here, while still recognizing that there is a certain amount of validity in the idea that truth must work to be truth for us.

The stage has been set, with its advances, with its errors, with its suggestions, and with its possibilities.



Let us turn to Part II and D. C. Macintosh as our first representative of modern empiricism.



PART TWO  
DEVELOPMENT





CHAPTER IV

DOUGLAS CLYDE MACINTOSH,  
RELIGIOUS EMPIRICIST



## CHAPTER IV

## DOUGLAS CLYDE MACINTOSH, RELIGIOUS EMPIRICIST

## 1

Douglas Clyde Macintosh was born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. His early training is what one might expect from a God-fearing evangelistic family whose mother was the teacher of the children. His early life and experience do not directly concern us, save that his religious experience was confined, not to Christian nurture as being important but, to conversion. As he tells us he felt that he was truly converted at fourteen years of age and at that time made what he termed the "right religious adjustment" and was sure of it. It is interesting to note these facts simply because they bear on his later feeling that Christian nurture is no substitute for being converted, and that the experience of right religious adjustment is the primary and most important one for a person to have. This emphasis comes out clearly in his later work.<sup>1</sup>

As we jump to his more mature thinking, we find that we are in the period of religious thought in which the emphasis is upon the problem of religious knowledge and ultimate

---

1

Vergilius Ferm, Contemporary American Theology, Chapter by Macintosh, "Toward a New Untraditional Orthodoxy," Round Table Press, Vol. 1, 1932, pp. 278-284 (A good discussion of his early life and experiences may be found in this chapter.)



reality of the religious object. We will be particularly concerned with the verification and the correspondence of truth with reality.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the writing of his first book, it was the conviction of Macintosh that the theological seminaries were either teaching a science that was not theology, or they were teaching a theology that was not scientific. He says that theology has never been an empirical science, but this does not mean it cannot be so in the future. His aim, therefore, was to prove an empirical science of theology that can be taught in the future.<sup>3</sup>

It is logical that we should study Macintosh after James, for, as Bixler says, Macintosh makes the next forward move in the field of empiricism with his critical monistic realism. This is not entirely a sensuous experience of the object, but rather through the self and through our consciousness we have an awareness of God, through "perception in a complex"! A physical object is seen through a collection of attributes, but as for "seeing" God, that is done only through the right religious adjustment, and the cultivation of a certain receptivity through a certain complex of feelings, volitions, and purposes. When we test this experience

---

<sup>2</sup> Wieman and Horton, op. cit., p. 218

<sup>3</sup> D. C. Macintosh, Theology as an Empirical Science, N. Y.: Macmillan, 1919, pp. 6;25





we find that it is as real as any scientific experience.<sup>4</sup>  
 This will be discussed further; now we are only attempting to show the connecting link between James and Macintosh.

Wieman and Meland classify Macintosh in the Ethical Intuitionists group, under the general term, "Romanticism". Whether this is entirely correct or not, their analysis of his importance and his main contribution may be noted. He is clear in what he intends to do; he seems to know where he is going in his work (even if the reader sometimes doesn't). Theology or philosophy if it is to be adequate must have two parts: (1) it must be based on rational and observable evidence, and (2) there must be more than that which is directly capable of empirical proof in order to make faith real in life, "Moral optimism" is what he calls this second part. These beliefs on the secondary level have to be reasonable; they cannot completely cut away from the base upon which they rest, but the secondary level is as essential as the primary for living religion. His division of the levels of belief may be noted here and discussed later. There are the verified beliefs, the pragmatic beliefs, and the speculative beliefs. Wieman and Meland say that these three levels correspond to the foundation of the house, the house we live in morally and religiously, and the domes and spires that adorn and enoble

---

<sup>4</sup> Julius Bixler, "Can Religion be Empirical", in The Nature of Religious Experience, (Ed.), N. Y.: Harpers, 1937, p. 70



the house. The concept of God may fit into all these levels, but what we think of him at each level will differ. First he exists, second he is personal, and third this same God is the creator of the world. But Macintosh is careful to say that this is not to be construed as romanticism; it is realism growing out of an earlier liberalism.<sup>5</sup>

Macintosh admits that others have had an influence upon him, especially James, whose Psychology made a profound impression and led him early to a type of old fashioned empiricism. The results of this influence can be seen later in his pragmatism and in his empirical development. The Will to Believe of James also influenced him, and though he says that he was tempted to Christian agnosticism, he felt that he wanted to believe and could see no good reason for not doing so, since he had the subjective assurance of belief. He recognized in James' theory of the "live hypothesis" a real possibility, and its carry-over in his work may be seen in the realm of secondary and tertiary beliefs. William Newton Clarke also influenced Macintosh. Macintosh read his, What shall we think of Christianity?, and in it saw the truth of the statement that the facts of theology must be experienceable to be true in one's life. Later on he read Clarke's Outlines of Christian Theology, which he also highly praises

---

<sup>5</sup>

Wieman and Meland, op. cit., pp. 159-160; 340



in a satisfactory manner and which is utilized to some extent in his later, Theology as an Empirical Science.<sup>6</sup>

Macintosh does not mention L. F. Stearns; whether there is influence there or not we cannot say, but we are certain that the trend started by Stearns was known by Macintosh.

The rest of this chapter will be devoted to what Macintosh has said and done in this field. Because of his pronounced importance in the field of philosophy of religion, specifically Metaphysics, critical philosophy, and epistemology, we shall deal largely with these subjects, since they form the base on which he erects his superstructure, and hopes others will do so after him.

## 2

Briefly let us look at the general method and pre-suppositions of procedure. There is a certain set of problems for any scientific theology; these may be summed up as: (1) Is there religious perception, or something in the religious realm that corresponds to perception? (2) Can we formulate theological laws based on religious experience that will tell us what the Divine Being will do on the fulfillment of certain conditions? (3) Can theological theory be con-

---

<sup>6</sup> Macintosh, "Toward a New Untraditional Orthodoxy," op. cit., pp. 291-292







structured in a scientific manner on these laws? These are the problems he attempts to answer in Theology as an Empirical Science; it is sufficient to say here that he believes they can be answered.<sup>7</sup>

Macintosh says definitions are vague in an empirical science to begin with, but that they proceed toward wholeness as one progresses in concreteness and verification. An empirical science, however, cannot postulate anything for deductions that does not have at least practical certainty. On the other hand, there are certain presuppositions that must be made, such as the general laws of thought, and the laws of empirical procedure in any science. One thing peculiar to the presuppositions of empiricism as a method in theology is that it will postulate the existence of God. The empirical assurance and practical certainty of the existence of God is proved by experience, and so it is a just presupposition for this "science" of theology.<sup>8</sup>

Discussing the possibilities underlying theology becoming a science he says:

If theology is to become a descriptive science on the basis of the reality and experienceableness of God, the empirical data of theology must be carefully collected for scientific treatment. (9)

---

<sup>7</sup> Macintosh, Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 26-27

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-29 (science postulates the existence of the object it seeks to know more about)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 31



What then, we ask, is the data? The answer is that it is the content of religious perception in modern times; or in ancient terminology, it is the facts of revelation. These facts must be critically examined for us to know what they are, and how they fit into the scheme of things in theology. (A criterion of revelation is needed) More than just a personal critical examination is needed of these facts; from them we must go to laws and generalizations, and thus individual descriptions of experiences are not in themselves valid premises on which to form laws. Laws are formulated in three ways, all of course used critically: (1) deductions from hypothesis to facts, (2) or from the specific facts to the more general laws by induction, (3) or a combination of the two may be used, at all times following the canons of truth as set forth by J. S. Mill. Macintosh maintains that all three ways may be used, but that all must find their roots in experience at some point for the sake of verification, and before they (the laws and generalizations) may be said to be valid.

He concludes the discussion of theological laws with some general statements as to the value of these laws and what they are:

The laws of empirical theology.....may  
be expected to be fundamentally voli-  
tional.....The laws of empirical  
Theology will naturally be of the ut-  
most importance in evangelism and  
Religious Education.....But



these laws are as important for  
theory as for practice.....(10)

If this type of theology is carried out it will  
displace all rivals in theology, if it is proved to be practical. Through empiricism will be solved in part the metaphysical problem, as well as the spiritual problems of daily religion. Of the importance of the metaphysical problem, and the reason we will consider it at length, he says:

To be sure, the submission of the  
theoretical part of a scientific  
theology to the fire of metaphysical  
criticism will constitute its last  
intellectual test. (11)

### 3

Considering first the foundation stone of his  
philosophy of religion, epistemology, Macintosh states his  
thesis thus:

.....in religious experience at its  
best there is a revelation (discovery)  
of a dependable reality, divine in  
quality and function, which promotes  
the good will in man on condition of  
his maintenance of the right religious  
adjustment.....

This discovery of the divine reality involves being able to  
formulate what is discovered about it, according to the  
laws of empirical theology, and thus we are able to construct

---

10 Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 32-41; 42-44

11 Ibid., pp. 44-46





a theory of the religious object which will be in scientific form.<sup>12</sup>

Macintosh does not hold that religion ultimately depends upon philosophy, yet he does believe that philosophical methods must be used, especially in the field of gaining knowledge, that religious knowledge will square with the truths of the other sciences and philosophy. A common sense theory of knowledge, usually, is the method of the sciences, but we need to use more than simply a common sense theory of knowledge which is naive. We need a rejuvenated theory which he calls critical common sense realism. He says of his procedure in this direction that it is both critical and conservative. He then discusses where this critical common sense theory fits into the general field of epistemology. It is realism as against idealism, for it is in the realm of realism that experiences are found that will fit into an empirical theology. It is critical versus dogmatic realism, i. e., "naive realism" and the "new realism". He condemns the two schools of realism that are not critical, and claims that their methods are not consistent with the facts of experience in any sphere.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> "Toward a New Untraditional Orthodoxy", op. cit., p. 306

<sup>13</sup> D. C. Macintosh, The Reasonableness of Christianity, N.Y.: Scribners, 1938, pp. 161-193



The next step is a consideration of dualism or monism, and the conclusion is that dualism is faulty at best. We will recall from the last chapter that Macintosh criticized the dualism of James and suggested that it led to agnosticism when pushed to its logical conclusion; thus we are not surprised at his advocating monism as the only approach that will give us true knowledge. He admits that there may be a duality in the thing we see and what the thing in itself is, still epistemological monism is the only road that will lead to truth, and thus our realism must be monistic.<sup>14A</sup> There is a small area in which "identity" is possible, so that the perception and object are in perfect accord (monism), but in other areas there is a dualism in which perception and the object do not meet. It is this recognition that makes his monism adequately critical and partial.<sup>14B</sup>

The next step is that of truth and proof. In the first place Macintosh says that the theories of truth advocated under the names of intellectualism, pragmatism, and intuitionism, are untenable in their distinct forms in a theory of critical monistic realism. The problem of the validation of truth is to be found in a synthesis of the three methods, and not in one alone. Through intellectualism and pragmatism we find a definition of truth by combining practical and intellectual aspects, and in intuitionism we find the

---

<sup>14A</sup> Reasonableness of Christianity, pp. 193-206

<sup>14B</sup> (Courtesy of R. C. Miller, whose corrections and advice I have been grateful for in this thesis.)



validation or the proof of truth. The problem of truth is not simply one of consistent inference, for that is too much like "formal" logic and not like the truth of reality as it is experienced and found. Real logic, the logic the empiricist must use, is characterized thus:

It must proceed with consistency in all its deductions, but its goal is the production of an adequately critical and universally valid certainty as to the truth of judgments about reality, and this is an affair of induction. (15)

The scientific method is what true inductive logic is. All generalizations from this induction must be tested by experience, experiment, and observation. Whatever theories we set up must be tested by this trial and error method, building up as we go, throwing out what proves not to be true and retaining the rest. The above applies to the general field of knowledge, but if this critical common sense realism is justified on the general philosophical level, then it ought to be accepted for religious knowledge also. The real difficulty, however, in the epistemological problem in religion, is related to

.....the extent and certainty of religious knowledge. (16)

Secular epistemology carries over into the religious

---

15 Reasonableness of Christianity, pp. 206-214

16 Ibid., pp. 214-217







field. Idealism in the secular field takes the form of psychological idealism in religious epistemology. Abstract idealism becomes absolute idealism; realism is found in several forms, extreme monism in the mystics, and dualism in many other theories. Against all these the only one that can stand criticism is critical monistic realism, because through it only, can God be known (in the fullest sense he means), when the right religious adjustment is made through our experience. One may ask how to make the right adjustment. Experience, says Macintosh, must teach us what is right. Thus, he says, just as we make our judgments about things in the physical realm depending upon what our senses (sensual experience) tell us, we make judgments about God according to what our religious experience tells us. The empirical argument for God which stems from this type of knowledge-theory, is the only adequate proof for the existence of God. Critical common sense in religion teaches us what we know of God by trial and error, since the wrong adjustment is quickly seen and discarded, while the right adjustment becomes another building block for our knowledge of God and religious reality.<sup>17</sup>

Having said this much he defines truth thus:

Religious truth is representation of  
religious reality, adequate for what-

---

<sup>17</sup> The Reasonableness of the Christianity, pp. 219-229



ever purposes ought to be considered  
in deciding between judgment and its  
contradictory. (18)

The three forms of the pragmatic test, conservative, radical, and critical, are all too one sided as a test of truth. The conservative test tries to prove too much, the radical too little, and the critical, though the best of the three, does not always make the transfer from the practical to the reality of God. He suggests that the mystical method, closely guarded, be used to supplement the critical pragmatic method and thus make a good test for truth. The pragmatic will help keep us away from the complete subjective dangers of mysticism, and the mysticism itself will bring us to an immediate contact with the divine reality. The best results are usually obtained by cooperation of the various methods rather than a single one, and this cooperation approaches the method of the sciences.<sup>19</sup> Under this epistemological theory one can work either from the specific to the general or vice versa, since at some point there will be a crucial experiment made with this theory of knowledge which will validate or invalidate the whole system. In this manner he can say that the data need not be only that of present experience, but may be the data of history which can be tested

---

18

The Reasonableness of the Christianity, p. 230

19

Ibid., pp. 232-233



by historical and empirical methods, and thus leave a wide base for empirical verification following the outlined laws of epistemological approach. Verification, we have said, will follow Mill's Canons, always of course the final test being correspondence of the theory with reality.<sup>20</sup>

Summing up what he has said about truth, he says:

.....the general notion of truth  
is taken from intellectualism, and  
the criterion of truth from pragmatism.

Thus we can make judgments which are accessible to the human mind, and at the same time are objectively valid.<sup>21</sup>

In this most important article in Religious Realism, Macintosh defines knowledge:

.....as adequate and adequately  
critical certitude of the presence of  
what is really present and of the truth  
of judgments which are really true....(22)

As in The Reasonableness of Christianity, so in his essay, he takes up the various types of epistemology and condemns them all save critical monistic realism, which however, he warns must not go to an extreme, else it is as fallible as other theories of knowledge; a mean must be kept.<sup>23</sup>

---

20

The Reasonableness of Christianity, pp. 233-244

21

D. C. Macintosh, "Experimental Realism in Religion", in Religious Realism, (ed. D. C. Macintosh and others), N. Y.: Macmillan, 1938, p. 331

22

Ibid., p. 338

23

Ibid., pp. 353-354







Following this statement he sets forth a number of steps by which he believes one can set up a critical monistic realism that will be adequate for all types of knowledge as well as that specifically religious. These steps are purely philosophical, but Macintosh feels they can be transferred to the religious sphere.<sup>24</sup>

How, then, may this transfer be made? Three things must be kept in mind.

1. All qualities and values that belong to the object of religious interest in religious experience, are not to be thought of as necessarily belonging to the divine reality in its independent existence.
2. What is directly experienced is not all of the Divine that there is in reality.
3. That if there is to be empirical knowledge of an independently existing divine reality, there must be a partial coincidence or identity of what is immediately experienced and appreciated of the Divine and a really Divine independent reality. (25)

This last is perhaps the most important, for unless there is at least partial identity, empiricism might as well leave the field. The critical monist believes in the identity and the possibility of knowledge; this is characteristic of his

---

<sup>24</sup> "Experimental Realism in Religion", op. cit., pp. 361-368  
(A complete discussion of the steps that carry one to critical monistic realism will be found on these pages.)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 374-375



position epistemologically.

We conclude this section on epistemology with a brief statement from an article by R. C. Miller, a former student of Macintosh. Dr. Miller states that of the religious realists, Macintosh is the only one to develop a complete theory of knowledge. This theory, in brief, is that the knowing subject and the perceived object exist independently of one another, but that in the process of knowing there is a partial identity. Direct awareness becomes truth only upon verification,<sup>26</sup> by the tests we have previously discussed.

The difficulty, says Dr. Miller, is that scientific verification is not possible for most beliefs, and so Macintosh must push a goodly number of them into the field he calls "reasonable beliefs" and "permissible surmises". Scientifically God can only be known as: .....the divine value producing factor..... beyond this verified scientific knowledge cannot go. Reasonable beliefs, based on "moral optimism" are all that we can have, and provided that these beliefs are consistent with our verified knowledge. Thus the transcendence of God is a reasonable belief, and that he is intelligent and good is a permissible surmise.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> R. C. Miller, "Religious Realism in America," Modern Churchman, Vol. 27, No. 9, Dec. 1937, pp. 504-505

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 505-506



Macintosh comes close to orthodoxy here but he warns against saying that this God is the God of the Christian Church, all we know is that:

.....on the condition of the right religious adjustment, a factor or reality, which we may call God, conditions in the individual, primarily in the will but ultimately in the nature more generally, the characteristic religious experience of moral and religious salvation. (28A)

From this we know that "a more than human power does function", one we can know something of, but critical monism carries us  
28B  
no further.

#### 4

The first block, a theory of knowledge, has been put in place and we turn now to a consideration of critical philosophy and metaphysics which Macintosh considers most important for the base of an adequate religious faith and religious philosophy.

Philosophy of religion is admittedly a branch of philosophy. Until lately this philosophy of religion has been largely metaphysical, but more recently still it has come to mean critical philosophy of religion, which means that the values of religion, rather than the nature of its reality, have been discussed. Most philosophers of religion

---

28A

D. C. Macintosh, Is there a God?, p. 251, (quoted in above article by Dr. Miller, p. 506

28B

cf. note 27





agree that critical philosophy of religion is important, but as for metaphysics there is not complete assurance. Critical philosophy must show that there is value in religion first, for if there is, then there is a logical need of metaphysics, but if critical valuations show that there is no value in religion, then naturally there will be no metaphysics of religion. Macintosh says that philosophy of religion divides into two divisions, critical and metaphysical, each having an empirical base and a philosophical superstructure.<sup>29</sup> We will consider critical philosophy first since upon the outcome of this discussion the metaphysics of religion will be erected, or not erected if religion proves to have no value for gaining knowledge of reality.

The empirical basis of the critical philosophy of religion is to be found in history, psychology and sociology of religion. Here we are dealing with the nature of religion and its development in reference to a certain goal. He says, we must distinguish the true essence of religion from the bad, that which is necessary to include in these studies into the nature of religion, and that which of necessity must be excluded. The essence, he says, is the measure of the actual and the ideal. At this point, it is

---

<sup>29</sup>

Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 234-235



necessary to make a distinction between the historical and the experimental approaches in religion. The historical approach would immediately suggest that in its essence religion is devotion to a divine ideal, but it is more than that we see from the experimental approach which points out that whether it is good or bad, religion is dependence upon the divine ideal. Most of the problems of philosophy of religion center about the experimental approach, since it does not do much good to question the value of religion in the sense of devotion to the ideal; that is simply a fact of history that is there. He believes what we have discussed above is the true essence of religion.<sup>30</sup>

Now what is "essential to religion"? In experimental religion it is essential to have something in experience that gives us evidence of the divine reality. For example, an experience of salvation is essential to the future of experimental religion from the more fundamental "feeling of dependence" (as Schleiermacher would have said). This much is essential to the very being of religion, what more can we say is essential to the WELL being of religion? Social life is fundamental here, for only in social life can the religious community survive by means of creed, the expression of religious ideas, worship, and the impulse to



live in a certain way in society which is motivated by the religious conviction. In addition to these specifically religious "essentials" we must consider the contributions of the general social life of society, the experience and history of the community both religiously and secularly. Within the community there is another need, that for an institution to propagate experimental religion. The true Church is this institution, for it most carefully propagates the best type of experimental religion. (N. B. He says the True Church, not any church!)<sup>31</sup>

Again to evaluate experimental religion empirically, we must not only see its development but see its general nature throughout history. We must see the types of religion in the world, the various large branches, Christian and otherwise, including all the smaller sects. Religions, as we examine them, are seen to pass in their development into more rational and moral spheres and interests, but if this were all religion would defeat itself in the end. There is a third and fundamentally important element in religions, the conservation of vitality, which keeps religion from rationalizing itself away. Thus he says:

Religion at its best, then, whatever else it may be, must be religion in its most vital, most moral, and most rational form. (32)

---

<sup>31</sup> Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 236-237

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 238







With these preliminaries out of the way, and indeed in his discussion "preliminaries" take up most of the pages, what is the value of religion? Taking religion as it has knowledge for values is easy, but it is more difficult to see wherein it gives us knowledge of reality. The value of religion for life may be seen empirically in the various human sciences. Religion here is helpful mostly as it develops the moral will of men, providing the distinction between good and bad be kept ever before us. When we consider religion at its best, is experimental religion of value to help promote the highest human values?<sup>33</sup> At this point, we are confronted with the problem of epistemology, which we have already tried to answer, by saying that we can have knowledge of religious reality through critical monistic realism.

We may say that critical philosophy followed by epistemology gives us an adequate base upon which to build a metaphysics, thus our conclusion is that religion can give us knowledge of ultimate reality if handled in a scientific manner and empirically at all times.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Theology as an Empirical Science, p. 239

<sup>34</sup> It would seem that the order of this chapter should be reversed, with epistemology following critical philosophy from our above statements; however Macintosh himself does not treat the subjects in any set order, and to the normal critical mind it would seem that epistemology would logically come first before anything could be said about the religious object, and religion per se.



## 5

Having established the right to consider metaphysics logically a part of philosophy of religion, let us see what Macintosh has to say in this field, keeping in mind the fact that this is a distinctly new step in empirical theology, an empirical metaphysics!

The subject matter of metaphysics is the nature of reality, viewed as nearly as possible as a whole. The history of metaphysics is not too encouraging for the future, since there seemed to be a lot of aimless wandering around, getting nowhere at all. There are three main types of metaphysical constructions or methods of construction:

1. The rationalistic or speculative system and method which utilizes deduction as its main method.
2. A synthesis of the recognized empirical sciences, leaving theology out, and thus ignoring one important field of human interest.
3. "A third metaphysical method seeks to remedy the deficiency of the second by effecting a combination of the established results of the recognized sciences with the metaphysical doctrines which are felt to be necessarily bound up with our consciousness of values".

This third is no better than the other two, says Macintosh, since in the end all one has is a synthesis of scientific information and a lot of unresolved postulates. He suggests, then, a fourth method. This is the synthesis of the results



of all the empirical sciences, and theology, as an empirical science, is therefore included in the group.<sup>35</sup>

The relationship between theology and metaphysics is important and must be understood. Metaphysics often has excluded theology since it felt that theology hurt it as an interpretation of reality. This objection would not hold true in empirical theology, since its methods are modern and it would not demand conclusions based on illogical presuppositions. On the other hand, theology has excluded metaphysics to a great extent. The Ritschlians are exceedingly guilty of this, he says. By cutting off metaphysics, theology has cut man off from testing the religious content of his beliefs so that he knows nothing of their correspondence with reality and certainty is endangered; the door is open to authoritarianism. A good metaphysics and theology, as an empirical science, could work together to the mutual enrichment of both. He defines the relation, that is hoped for, between the two:

Theological theory, resting upon empirical theological laws, will furnish material for metaphysical hypotheses as do scientific theories in general.

When both theology and metaphysics become reformed, theology being empirical, and metaphysics a wise synthesis of all the areas of human experience, they will aid each other. Theology will give metaphysics a firmer background on which to

---

<sup>35</sup>Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 247-248







build from experience, and metaphysics will give theology tests for certainty in its theory of the reality of the universe.<sup>36</sup> The particular metaphysical systems and doctrines pertaining thereto are not our interest, we simply wish to point out the importance of this relationship in religion, empirical religion, as seen by Macintosh, particularly against the opposite foil of James' empiricism.

In his more apologetic approach, The Reasonableness of Christianity, Macintosh says that the meeting place of theology and science is metaphysics. If theology were given a place in metaphysics, it would make the theology more reasonable, and the metaphysics would become more rich, more secure, and more real, thus doubly ensuring the reasonableness of theology. Always, he reminds us, the whole problem of metaphysics and theology must be approached from the epistemological theory we have outlined.<sup>37</sup>

In the Pilgrimage of Faith, Macintosh says that religion will either stand or fall in accordance with the way in which it can meet the arguments and facts that science may bring to bear upon it, and for this reason a scientific metaphysics is most important for theology to have. He admits that at the present, prior to 1931 at least, theological metaphysics is only a program, but an important one. The

---

<sup>36</sup>Theology as an Empirical Science, pp. 248-249

<sup>37</sup>The Reasonableness of Christianity, Chapter XIII, (The rest of this chapter is the same material as found in the appendix to Theology as an Empirical Science.)



reason that we do not have a complete theological metaphysics is partly due to the fluid state of the sciences which have a bearing upon this field; their findings cannot all be systematized as yet. (This makes one wonder if a theological metaphysics will ever be possible if we have to wait for all the "evidence" from the sciences.) Macintosh says that religion offers this to the total problem of metaphysics:

It offers a religious hypothesis  
for religious consideration.

If metaphysics is to make a contribution to religion it must be empirical, include the practical values of life, and be rationally self consistent at all times, as well as offer a synthesis of all the results of empirical sciences.<sup>38</sup>

In this book he makes clear the fact that metaphysical speculation is not as important as the values from the moral consciousness and religious experience. These he admits are of greater value in such a world as we live in, and thus we must be careful not to lose ourselves in metaphysical speculation that does not relate to life at some point. This is his criticism of much that the Personalists have to say, when they personify their metaphysical speculations.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> D. C. Macintosh, The Pilgrimage of Faith, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1927, pp. 230-231; 236-237

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 264-265





In his essay in Religious Realism, he recapitulates much that we have already discussed and continues that although we cannot know metaphysical reality as we should like to know it as a complete whole, we can know parts of it. We can know these parts by the way in which we see them acting in our experience, and therefore we can conclude that certain aspects of a reality exist which point to a whole. These various parts, often heterogeneous in character, we must try to synthesize and familiarize ourselves with, in order to know more what the whole metaphysical reality is. In this connection it is interesting to note that he uses an illustration of electrons playing their part in the whole, though not necessarily knowing of it, which is quite suggestive of James' illustration of pets in our homes and their relation to the whole of life and history. Both illustrations serve the same purpose, to show our place in the cosmos and something of what our knowledge is like in that connection.<sup>40</sup>

If I may venture a personal opinion, it seems to me that though this essay is supposed to be of great importance, he has said the same things in earlier works in much clearer form. The difference here is perhaps the approach, which is from ontology rather than the broader meta-

---

<sup>40</sup>

"Experimental Realism in Religion", op. cit., pp. 383-409





physics. Also there is a distinct mixing of critical philosophy and metaphysics which makes for a rather muddy discussion. Frankly, earlier material is better for understanding this part of Macintosh's empiricism.

In all these selections we have chosen for discussion of metaphysics, we are continually impressed with the empirical method which is used quite consistently. There is a distinct flavour of Whitehead's philosophy throughout, though Macintosh criticizes Whitehead for his metaphysical God, which Macintosh says is something of a split-personality; the immanent and the transcendent do not come together in a whole. In the main however, Macintosh seems to accept, implicitly to be sure, the Whiteheadian metaphysical system in its broader sweeps.<sup>41</sup>

In his latest work in this field, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, Macintosh repeats much of the same material, but there are some different conclusions, particularly as to the level of belief into which metaphysics can fit as knowledge.

Again he reiterates the need of philosophy for religion, and vice versa, for a strong and a vital faith. A rightly constructed theology may offer problems, but it also

---

<sup>41</sup> This is a personal conclusion based on our study in this field. However for an interesting collaboration on this point, cf. R. C. Miller, "Empirical Method and Its Critics", Anglican Theological Review, Vol. 27, 1945.



may help to solve certain problems of metaphysics, particularly those problems which arise out of the synthesization of the sciences, and the nature of the sciences. Even keeping these values in mind, Macintosh warns:

But however much the generalizations of science may be incorporated in the final result, a metaphysical system... will be, as a total system, of the nature of reasonable faith rather than of verified knowledge, and so not essentially different from theology. (42)

Also in this book he is not quite as narrow as before; he is willing to leave more room for both sides of the problems. The metaphysics he envisions in this book is a good deal broader and more comprehensive than previously, and one wonders if the idea of paradox is not creeping into his system. He sees as the special task of theological metaphysics to form the foundation blocks upon which may be constructed a metaphysical theology whose task will be to attack the problems of the philosophical interpretation of God, revelation, Christology, salvation, etc. (Here for the first time he states the concrete job of metaphysics in theology.)

He concludes by saying that theology must not only suggest new problems to metaphysics, but must give a new tang to the old and equally as important problems. Meta-

---

42  
The Problem of Religious Knowledge, p. 376



physics must give to theology:

.....a more reasonably defensible  
content, and more rational certainty.....

It may be true that in the past theology and metaphysics have not worked well together, that they have harmed each other because of faulty methods and presuppositions, but the past is the past, and for the future:

.....the best results in either  
field, given the use of the right  
method on both sides, theology and  
metaphysics are mutually indispen-  
sable. (43)

6

Lest some say, "where is the practical in all this?", we will attempt to give the flavour of Macintosh on the more practical side of religious living, before attempting a criticism of his empiricism, which for this study is by far the most important of his contributions to American theological development.

Two books stand out on the practical side, <sup>44</sup>Social Religion and Personal Religion. Of these two fields he says:

Social religion is dedication to the reign of the will of God in social relations. Personal religion is self-surrender to God with a view to his will being accomplished in the individual's own life and character.

---

<sup>43</sup>The Problem of Religious Knowledge, pp. 376; 377-381; 381

<sup>44</sup>By "practical" I do not mean to deny that such a book as the Reasonableness of Christianity, is not practical, but rather the more personal side of the religious life, 'less theoretical'.







and his true hope and method for the future he expresses in these words:

.....the grace of God is accessible now, and waits only 'the revealing of the sons of God' bearing to every man and to all nations God's 'word of reconciliation'. The surest road to right reconciliation between nation and nation and between man and man is the way of reconciliation on God's terms, between man and God. (45)

In the first chapter in Personal Religion, by a series of letters from an old New England family he deals with a concrete historical situation in which he traces the personal religion of this evangelical family from conservative beginnings, through 19th century rationalism, and finally to the beginnings of the restatement of their faith in categories acceptable to the modern mind, but without losing the evangelical note. The object seems to be to show that personal religion is not lost by new categories and the appeal to experience.<sup>45</sup>

In the next chapter on Modern Evangelicalism there is an attempted restatement of the traditional doctrines of the faith, God, Christ, sin, etc. and their effect upon our lives. Of Christ he says that we see in Him, no matter what

---

<sup>45</sup> D. C. Macintosh, Personal Religion, N. Y.: Scribners, 1942, Intro. pp. viii; xii

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-106 (For a full discussion)



our Christological theories may be, the right religious adjustment to the will of God. What Christ did, was, to a great extent, dependent upon this right religious adjustment. And so for us, salvation in a sense depends upon this empirical right religious adjustment in a very practical way.<sup>47</sup> He concludes this chapter by saying that man must learn by experience to adapt himself to God's way for it is the only way of life. Man will only learn by trial and error and constantly striving for that adjustment that will bring him close to God's way.<sup>48</sup> The empiricism is obvious here, and implicit is epistemology and metaphysics as they fit into the right religious adjustment. Practical though he may be, Macintosh does not forget his underpinnings found in earlier writings.

The third chapter, and last one on the fundamentals of personal religion, is on prayer. It is practical, intellectual, empirical and yet at the same time, its beauty and feeling for the problems of the prayer life point out that Macintosh has real feeling for man as he is, as well as he ought to be. There is no backsliding on "theory"; he is a philosopher, theologian, metaphysician and pastor as he

---

<sup>47</sup> Personal Religion, pp. 112-119 (This field is being handled by F. P. Dignam)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 148-148



deals with these problems.<sup>49</sup>

This has been brief, but at least I hope it will help us keep a balance in mind as we criticize this man. For the most part our criticisms will be against the base of his empiricism, but it is well for us to keep in mind that we are criticizing only a part, and that when we see the total picture our impressions may not be so negative, no matter how "orthodox" or "radical" we may be.

7

G. B. Smith, in a review of Theology as an Empirical Science, makes some interesting observations. He asks, first, where are the limits of empirical theology? They are not, he says, suggested in the book. He goes on to say that the ideas and concepts that are dealt with, God, Christ, salvation, etc., are simply the ideas of traditional theology. That is all right, but in dealing with these concepts there is no more than a modification of them, and not a scientific theological system. For instance, the Aseity of God is dealt with, and Smith wonders how an empiricist can deal with this question, and if an empiricist can, then

---

49

Personal Religion, pp. 148-180. I must admit that this book has made a profound impression upon me in favour of Macintosh and my opinion would be that if a person can be an empiricist and still be as vital as this book indicates, the "faith" is in no serious way endangered by empiricism.





where (in heaven's name) do the limits of the science lie?<sup>50</sup>

Smith continues by saying that if Macintosh wants to test his ideas or religious object empirically, he should at least switch to a metaphysical system that does not make for implications that are untenable for his position of realism, i. e., how can one test scientifically doctrines born out of a foreign metaphysical system in a system of today that is totally at variance with the one of traditional theology?<sup>51</sup> I should say that had Smith read the appendix somewhat more carefully he might have seen the answer to his own question, though he has a point, the necessity of the couching of the doctrines in a metaphysical system such as that in which they will be tested. Macintosh later seems to see this objection and his answers are found in Religious Realism and The Problem of Religious Knowledge.

Smith continues his criticisms by saying that the attempt to rescue theology from subjectivism seems to him a lost cause as far as this book is concerned, and for this reason readers will lose interest when they see that the problem is not squarely dealt with at the start. The conservatives will not like the book because miracles are cast out, and the critically minded won't like it because of the

---

50

G. B. Smith, Review of Theology as an Empirical Science, in American Journal of Theology, Vol. 24, January 1920, pp. 152-153

51

Ibid., p. 153



outmoded metaphysics implicitly accepted by the doctrines dealt with in the main part of the book, and will thus refuse to follow the dialectic of argument. The last criticism is the most devastating to Smith. He feels that Macintosh is trying to make converts to religious realism, rather than setting forth the meaning of religious beliefs in our experience, either religiously or scientifically. Smith thinks that Macintosh should put more emphasis upon the philosophical rather than the scientific in his discussion of religion and beliefs, for, he says, the scientific procedure will not profit as much as the philosophical in this field.<sup>52</sup> (Smith does see, however, the importance of Macintosh's work, more by what he does not say, rather than by what he does.)

Wieman and Meland seem to take particular delight in criticizing Macintosh, and Meland says that Macintosh is not what he pretends to be. Macintosh claims to be a realist, but actually when one looks closely into his reasoning there is a definite romantic trend. Remembering the influence of Wieman on Meland, I would be inclined to say that they are criticizing specifically here the two secondary levels of belief as being "romantic". Wieman re-

---

52

Smith, op. cit., pp. 153-154



inforces what Meland says when he says that though Macintosh prefers to be called a realist:

.....the view he represents proceeds  
upon the basis of the intuitive appeal  
tested by reason and practical experience.

Wieman calls him an ethical intuitionist.<sup>53</sup> (It seems like haggling over words, criticizing just to be criticizing. Is it vital?)

One of the most difficult and recurring criticisms that have been levelled at Macintosh is that over moral optimism. In his later books he seems to answer the criticism pretty well, says Dr. Miller, but it will be well for us to see just what the criticism is at this point. The theory is open to a double criticism, that of reasoning in a circle, and the non-verification of the concept of moral optimism at the conclusion of the argument. Macintosh maintains that if moral optimism is justified, then there is a power of good that justifies it; optimism being right, thus the power of good that justifies it exists. This, say Wieman and Horton, is the danger of basing all religious truth upon experience; it becomes subjective when stated in this manner. The Reasonableness of Christianity argues somewhat in this manner, but it is answered, it seems to me, in The Problem

---

<sup>53</sup> Wieman and Meland, op. cit., pp. 340; 348, footnote 8







of Religious Knowledge. Empiricism must guard itself, say Wieman and Horton, against this kind of reasoning else it will be even more open to criticism in the future.<sup>54</sup>

In the book dedicated to Macintosh, The Nature of Religious Experience, (One wonders at the dedication!) George F. Thomas claims that through it may be possible to establish a science of religious experience by experiment which can help practical living, still religious experience used in this manner has no knowledge value at all. This criticism, if true, would demolish all that Macintosh has to say, but fortunately it is answered by Macintosh in a most admirable manner. We suggest the criticism to show how far some of the so called "friends" of Macintosh go in trying to refute his system.<sup>55</sup>

The answering of the criticisms of the book mentioned above is brought more forcibly forward when Macintosh briefly summarizes his own aims and defends in a fine manner what he has done. We note this defense since it helps clarify his aims in this field and guides our criticisms more carefully.

Some of my critics seem not to realize that I am very far from claiming that the whole of theology can be set forth in the form of a descriptive empirical

---

54

Wieman and Horton, op. cit., p. 423

55

D. C. Macintosh, "Empirical Theology and Some of its Misunderstandings" in Review of Religion, May, 1939, Vol. 3, pp. 389ff



science. Most of the defensible interesting propositions of theology must remain, I readily admit, in such a form and with such certainty as they can have in a normative theological science based on a critical philosophy of values, or in a metaphysical theology integrated into a general philosophical system. (56)

Of a more general nature are the criticisms of Richard Kroner, who is hardly in sympathy with the empiricists, and yet whose criticisms make delightful reading as well as posing suggestive questions for the empiricists to answer. Kroner starts out by ridiculing the whole idea of a scientific theology, particularly as found in The Pilgrimage

---

56

"Empirical Theology and Some of Its Misunderstanders",  
op. cit., p. 393

R. C. Miller attempts to defend Macintosh from the criticisms found in The Nature of Religious Experience, and his defense follows in the main the suggestions of Macintosh in the above quote. However on one point I would question Miller, where he maintains that Macintosh's empiricism is not dependent upon his critical monism. On the contrary, it seems to me that this is an important point, and that Macintosh makes clear its importance by throwing out all other epistemological theories and saying that critical monism is the only approach for truth. Perhaps I have misunderstood Miller, but in the light of Macintosh's whole system it seems essential that critical monism be kept. Miller answers this criticism by saying that his point is that empiricism stands if any epistemology can prove the existence of what is experienced, and that some dualistic realists claim to do this. Miller himself leans toward Macintosh's position, but holds the way open for the dualists (Pratt; Calhoun) from the epistemological point of view. (from 'conversations') For a fuller discussion, Cf. The Problem of Religious Knowledge, Chapters 11, 12, 20, 21; and R. C. Miller, "Professor Macintosh and Empirical Theology", Personalist, Winter, 1940





of Faith, which suggests the time honored Indian system of religion must be completely changed for science. He criticizes the inexact terminology of Macintosh. Just what is "modern religion"? What is the religion of Jesus? What is the religion of Paul? What is the religion of the Old Testament? This is a muddle! He goes on to say that Macintosh just plain does not have the courage of his convictions, for if he did he would follow through his presuppositions logically, and would be forced to say that Biblical religion is simply superstition, and thus of very little value. Kroner says that in contrast to Macintosh, Wieman has the courage, but look where it lands him. Kroner blasts at both for their conclusions. Kroner has a gift for sarcasm, and uses it well, but his criticisms sound too much like an awfully scared man who is shouting to keep his courage up. He has almost the sound of James when James goes after the absolutists. Kroner never hits at the roots of empiricism, making one wonder if he really understands it in its full meaning.<sup>57</sup>

He goes on to say:

.....the theological science worked out by Macintosh is only an example of a metaphysical aberration generated by the overwhelming impression of scientific progress and technical advance. (58)

---

<sup>57</sup> Richard Kroner, How Do We Know God? N.Y.: Harpers, 1943, pp. 39-41

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 44





The fundamentalists and the empiricists share the same errors; the former claims literal truth for all revelation and the latter tries to produce a scientific substitute for the prophetic cry and to make its own language literal and hard. The trouble with empiricism is that it tries to copy the sciences as if there were any virtue in that, and forgets that there is a real difference between God and the objects of the universe with which science deals, e.g. the equations in Macintosh's Problem of Religious Knowledge. Kroner levels a last criticism in a more general vein by saying that empirical religion is far below that of Biblical, or revealed religion, and it betrays a low religious experience that is far worse, or lower, than what we find in the Bible: that God is a set of laws, that we can know little of Him on a verified plane; that He is no more than the object of a religious science, Kroner rejects as worse than medieval barbarism.<sup>59</sup>

Kroner, in spite of his own methodological difficulties and perhaps lack of understanding, does hit at one crucial point which seems to be the seat of his criticism, the need for religious vitality which he feels empiricism does not have. Reading only some of Macintosh one might well make this criticism, but reading Social Religion and



Personal Religion one sees another side, the vital side of the empirical approach. However, we must take these criticisms seriously. There is need for real religious experience that is not simply controlled and static, a universal laboratory experiment. This, empiricism must keep in mind. However I am inclined to believe that Kroner is having difficulty with the vocabulary as much as anything else.<sup>60</sup>

## 8

Having suggested various types of criticisms of Macintosh, in a most cursory manner to be sure, let us evaluate, summarize and conclude this section with a more positive statement of his contribution to the developing history of empiricism in America.

We have emphasized over and over again the need for metaphysics in an adequate philosophy of religion, but in spite of this emphasis, in spite of the need for the correspondence of truth with objective reality and the squaring with other sciences, Macintosh does not fall into the trap of organic naturalism; there is more than that in his theology as he looks at the universe. There is, of course, an organic character in the universe, but in his article in Religious Realism, he seems to be saying that

---

<sup>60</sup> Kroner seems to be indicting the empiricism of Wieman more than that of Macintosh, though he does not make a clear distinction.



there is a teleological character above the organic that must be taken into account. The full meaning of the universe cannot be understood apart from freedom and redemption which are in the realm of teleology. This recognition by Lyman saves Macintosh from being called, as some have named him, a naturalist through and through.<sup>61</sup>

We have noticed that Macintosh is particularly hard on the dualists in his epistemology, and it may be well to say that at least he is being consistent in this and is not falling into the difficulties of dualism. Whatever we may say of the criticisms of Macintosh, it is certain that his epistemology offers the best hope of knowledge, religious and metaphysical in the empirical field. Only in this way can we adequately account for the empirical laws we find and their verification. It is true his normative theology may be open to some question; there is not enough recognition of the frustrations in the religious sphere, and there is an optimistic flavour that needs some correcting. At least the epistemological base is laid firmly; others can build on that and add the lacking elements.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Eugene Lyman, "The Realistic Movement", in Theology and Modern Life, (ed.) P. A. Schilpp, Chicago: Willett Clark, and Co., 1940, Chapter VI

<sup>62</sup> R. C. Miller, review of The Problem of Religious Knowledge, Review of Religion, Vol. 5, pp. 470-471  
(also cf. footnote 56) (epistemological controversy)







The data for religious knowledge is provided by the right religious adjustment through critical monism. Knowledge is tested in three ways: (1) logical consistency with itself and other branches of knowledge, (2) pragmatic adequacy, and (3) immediate experience. Thus far we can gain some knowledge of God, but not enough for religious living. From this base, therefore, there must be, and is, speculation, but for Macintosh it is consistent with the presuppositions set down beforehand. This latter part, the so called superstructure, cannot be empirically verified, and therefore the term "science" may be a misleading one to apply to his theology. The place of critical philosophy and metaphysics and their importance has been discussed. Moral optimism and its place in theology has also been considered and criticized as being of value, if in the right place, after God has been empirically "proven".<sup>63</sup>

The emphasis of Macintosh upon a firm empirical footing, the necessity of the right religious adjustment, has carried us far beyond James in this field. Miller emphasizes the fact that there is no reason why theology has to make a completely fresh start, for he believes with Macintosh that one can start with the testing of the traditional

---

<sup>63</sup> R. C. Miller, "Professor Macintosh and Empirical Theology", Personalist, Winter, 1940, pp. 26-40



doctrines to see how they square with reality and experience, and then go into new paths. Macintosh's work offers many possibilities for continued study in religious theology supplemented, says Miller, by perhaps the rich analogical theology suggested by Robert Calhoun, if we are not afraid to forge ahead. There are two lines along which development may come upon the base laid down by Macintosh.

- (1) the analysis of religious experience, to seek the objective reality of something beyond ourselves free from value presuppositions, and
- (2) there will be the analysis of the experience of value, both in and out of the more specific religious experience.

Miller concludes, saying that the vocabulary may perhaps need revamping, since though God may be empirically verified for religious living, still His verification for scientific adequacy must needs wait more evidence. (Controversy over word "scientific")<sup>64</sup>

Macintosh himself has something to say concerning the future of liberal theology and his own views in particular, that we should take into account. He says that the way of modern liberal theology is more suggestive for new values than the older traditional and more literalistic

---

64

"Professor Macintosh and Empirical Theology", op. cit., pp. 40-41



methods. Liberalism does not try to presuppose and defend a stated set of doctrines that are traditional, but rather it seeks to follow certain basic human needs and interests in working out a new theology for life. This liberalism is interested in all that is good, true, and reasonable for humanity.<sup>65</sup> And further he says of the job to be done and his hope for empirical theology:

.....it remains only to express the writer's conviction that in the main the problems of theology, empirical and normative, and metaphysical, will not in the end prove too difficult for the honest and painstaking religious mind; that while there may be much that will pass temporarily out of certitude into tentativeness, there will be no need of despair of the possibility of further progress from the temporary tentativeness into a reasonable and more objective reassurance; that a certain limited but highly important body of religious knowledge is possible for us; and, for the rest, that not only in the end.....but before and throughout the whole process, within the limits of what is psychologically and logically possible in view of accessible facts, we have the moral right to believe as we must, if we are to live as we ought. (66)

---

65

D. C. Macintosh, "Eternal Life", in Liberal Theology, (ed.) D. Roberts and H. P. Van Dusen, N.Y.: Scribners, 1942, pp. 240-241

66

The Problem of Religious Knowledge, pp. 381-382  
(Further interesting criticisms and defenses by Macintosh will be found in the article by Macintosh, "Theology, Valuational or Existential", Review of Religion, Vol. c, May 1939)





CHAPTER V

HENRY NELSON WIEMAN, RIGID EMPIRICIST



## CHAPTER V

## HENRY NELSON WIEMAN, RIGID EMPIRICIST

## 1

It is in the writings of Henry Nelson Wieman, says Aubrey, that we find the clue to the possibility of a modern metaphysics in religion based not only on his insights, but also on those of Alfred North Whitehead.<sup>67</sup> It is for this reason that Wieman stands next to Macintosh in our development of the study of empiricism in America, for we have noted in the past chapter the place of metaphysics in the thought of Macintosh, and how important he feels it to be for the future of empirical theology.

Wieman tells us that he was never "taught religion" as a child in the sense of a formulary of faith. He talked religion with his parents, but was never "indoctrinated" by them. He was further never led to believe that religion and the church were one and the same, in spite of the fact that his father was a minister. Church to young Wieman was "religious religion", a good business when run correctly, but it was never his religion.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Aubrey, op. cit., p. 182

<sup>68</sup> H. N. Wieman, "Theocentric Religion" in Ferm, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 339-340



He tells us that when he went to college he was never perturbed with religious doubts, and that his final decision for a career came quite suddenly to him, as he had always planned to be a journalist, but his new decision was to be a philosopher of religion. He went to San Anselmo Seminary to "study religion", not to be a minister. His experiences there were most interesting and most of the time he found himself on the "rebel" side of the fence. He then went to Europe to study but was not interested in the great Harnack and the historical approach which was then the greater center of interest. Wieman felt that the historians could not make religion vital for life, that the philosophical approach was the only possibility for that. Following his return from Europe he went to Harvard where he was influenced by Hocking and Perry. Although he did not accept the system of Hocking, he was grateful to him for many important religious insights. Later influences were Dewey and the pragmatists, although he never became one of their number, and Whitehead, to whom he feels he owes a great debt especially in the field of metaphysics, as we shall shortly see. It is clear that Wieman did not just "take over" from other men; he disagrees with his teachers on many points, but in his religious philosophy we see more than just Wieman peering from the pages.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup>"Theocentric Religion," op. cit., pp. 342-346





Wieman sets forth his aim as trying to promote theocentric religion, as against anthropocentric religion. The requirements for this kind of religion are:

.....that we make the actuality of God himself, and not our ideas about God, the object of our love and devotion. The second requirement.....is that we do not allow our wishes and needs to shape our idea of God, but shall shape it solely in the light of objective evidence. (70)

The method for this kind of study must be scientific, but that does not mean that it is limited to the techniques of physics and chemistry alone.

We mean that method which is made up of a combination of observation and reason. By checking the constructs of reason by observation, and directing our observation by the constructs of reason, we gradually acquire an idea of objective reality, and circumvent the thronging urgency of our desires which so persistently hide from us the real nature of objective existence.

God is more than a personal wish; we hold our ideas of Him in tentativeness, and thus is theocentric religion possible.<sup>71</sup>

Before we can understand Wieman at all we must take a brief look at his concept of value. The concern of religion is with values, says Wieman, and his theory of value is realistic, which remakes humanism over into a new devotion

---

70 "Theocentric Religion", p. 346 (Note difference from James' idea of the "live option" and verification of wish)

71 Ibid., p. 347



to the superhuman. The superhuman is that which transcends human ideas of value, and also that which makes possible the human values that humanism seeks. More concretely, devotion is attached to any movement that is integrative at the highest conceivable level, but there is more than this--the challenge to go on to the unknown and the higher values that may be there.<sup>72</sup>

Wieman's thought is not unlike that of Ames, Dewey, Shaier Mathews, and G. B. Smith in that he starts with the experience of value in the world as a method of deriving criteria for his definitions of God and religion. He differs from the above men, in that he holds to the empirical path rigidly. God is an object of experience, even as any other object that can be apprehended. God is perceived as well as conceived, He is the object of immediate experience. This is truly rigid empiricism.<sup>73</sup>

His method is set down for us in Religious Experience and Scientific Method and he has stuck to it. He is totally unemotional. The preacher, the moral category of the must or ought, and the intuitive, as usually understood, do not appeal to him. He stays only by observation and reason as the methods of knowledge. Mysticism is not ignored, in-

---

<sup>72</sup>

Aubrey, op. cit., pp. 183-185

<sup>73</sup>

Wieman and Meland, op. cit., p. 295



deed it has an important place in his thinking, but it is not knowledge unless it be tested by the scientific method as any other bit of knowledge will be tested.<sup>74</sup>

Religion, he says, is the name we give to problem-solving when the problems are complex and difficult and when they are not simply intellectual problems but vital ones, which concern life and living, in their final solutions. He distinguishes between theology and philosophy by considering theology the study of religious beliefs, and thus once removed from the actual religious life; philosophy of religion is the study of the concepts that make up these beliefs and is thus twice removed from the religious life. Belief is more important than abstract concepts, but belief cannot get along without them in the religious life.<sup>75</sup>

Finally in this introduction we need to keep in mind that for Wieman, as for Whitehead and James, the heights of religion are reached in solitariness; the person's own adjustment to God is the most important thing in life. Religion must be personal in the developing of habits and cultivating worship. Religion must be incommunicable and uniquely of the individual, the most precious thing about him.

---

74

Wieman and Meland, op. cit., pp. 297-298

75

H. N. Wieman, The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, N. Y.: Macmillan, 1927, pp. 7-11





The communicable part about religion, and this is important for Wieman, are the abstract concepts that help him develop this personal religion. This method, the use of abstract concepts, may be passed on to another, but the experiences and even the beliefs remain uniquely individual and account for differences of religion. Religion is solitary at its heights, but it may be passed on to another, else it has no reality for the individual.<sup>76</sup>

## 2

We turn to consider two subjects that are so related that we cannot divorce them, and are of the utmost importance for us, God and our knowledge of God. (Epistemology) He defines God:

God is that feature of our total environment which most vitally affects the continuance and welfare of human life. More specifically God is that character of events to which man must adjust himself in order to attain the greatest goods and avoid the greatest ills. (77)

We have said that Wieman does not consider religious knowledge any different from other forms of knowledge as far

---

<sup>76</sup> The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 29 (This idea of solitude will be more fully discussed in a later section)

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 14



as perception is concerned. Direct awareness of God may be different, but this cannot be construed as knowledge. All knowledge of anything must ultimately rest upon science, since the scientific method is the method of knowing.<sup>78</sup> In another book he says that God is an object to be perceived through the senses, but this can only happen when we have so developed the habits of perception that they can be used to know God. Sense experience is not perception, but in the same sense that we perceive that the earth is round by sense perception, we come to know God. We apprehend God as something upon which human life is supremely dependent. Even now we do perceive God to some extent, but there is such a mass of sensory experience about us, that we must be able to develop habits of perception before we can separate the perceptions of God from other perceptions; we need to isolate by our habits, else we can never understand.<sup>79</sup>

There are two kinds of knowledge, that of acquaintance and that of description. The former we get through experience of the object, and the second is gained through concepts, since it is not an actual part of experience. Concepts in descriptive knowledge do not relate to experience,

---

<sup>78</sup> H. N. Wieman, Religious Experience and Scientific Method, N. Y.: Macmillan, 1926, pp. 21-23

<sup>79</sup> The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 83-96



and thus a perfect system may be built of concepts that do not relate to the concrete. On the other hand, concepts of acquaintance lead directly to experience. The importance of this discussion comes about when we ask, "Is our knowledge of God by description or acquaintance?" He is either an object of sensory experience, or simply a system of concepts.<sup>80</sup>

In any case we know God through concepts, but whether or not they are empty is the crucial point. If he is not an object of sense experience then he cannot be known by the sciences. Logic must enter in, it is true, but it is of value only when our knowledge is by acquaintance, for logic in knowledge by description does not relate to experience. The answer to our problem, however, is that God is known in experience; thus our concepts are not empty, since we experience something; God, if nothing more, is that something.<sup>81</sup>

But then we ask, why don't we know just what God is in our experience of him if we know him? The answer is that the experience of God merges with so many other experiences that it is hard to isolate, as we said above. The only way we will be able to know God better, to isolate our experience of him from other experiences, is by further development of a scientific theology.<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 24-28

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 29

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-31





Science may help us in gaining knowledge of God, but three things are required of this method:

- (1) A clarification of that type of experience which can be called distinctly religious;
- (2) an analysis or elucidation of that datum in this experience which signifies the object being experienced, God;
- (3) and inference concerning the nature of this object. (83)

In this regard it is interesting to note that Wieman admits his debt to William James and Hocking for aiding in distinguishing the religious experience from other kinds.

In the great crises of life we may experience God; in an emotional breakdown, when the established systems of response are lost and we seem aware of total experience rather than isolated experiences. The things that create the experiences of God are hard to find. For that reason, we are not experiencing him all the time, and when that experience comes we may be either emotionally upset, or we may be quiet and still. There is always uncertainty, inadequacy, and indefiniteness of the concept of the object experienced in total experience. Because of this vagueness he says:



Religious experience gives us an indubitable datum, which is more certain than knowledge, but it does not give us knowledge of God, except as it is correctly and exhaustively interpreted. (84)

Even here a distinction must be made between the knowledge that we have experienced God and knowledge of what sort of an object God is. The knowledge that we have experienced God is the most important, but we must go further into what he is. This matter should come second in all theologies. In this age of science, the danger is not so much that we will not experience God, but that the quality of religion will decline; the understanding of God will lessen in practical application. For this reason, for understanding what God is, religion needs science to help it build its superstructure.<sup>85</sup>

The experience of God is not religion, the experience must be interpreted for religion and that interpretation must be in and for the age in which man lives. Thus, for this age a scientific interpretation seems best for our understanding of God. The counter-balance of the narrowness of the scientific method will be the mystic experience which transcends the bounds of science. Therefore, if we

---

84 Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 39-40

85 Ibid., pp. 40-42



would have a science of God, and more, we must have open minds in the matter. The fact that this science does not exist as yet does not mean it never will. For it to exist is of the utmost importance if we would verify our beliefs, particularly those gained from the mystic method which goes beyond science.<sup>86</sup>

Although it is of far greater importance to find our adjustment to God and the value of that adjustment, still we need to know something of what he is. This knowledge comes only as we adjust to him in our worshipping life. Through worship and the experimental process we find out what God is. This is practical knowledge. Conceptual knowledge is important also, for if we mis-speculate we hurt and destroy the substance of religion, and we pass on, by these concepts, falsehood.<sup>87</sup>

Wieman goes on to discuss Whitehead's idea of God, which he seems to accept. God is the "principle of concretion", the principle by which all things in the universe come to focus in each being. This "principle" is best seen in the esthetic order of things. God is not pantheistic, he is above totality and pervades all things. He is both more and less than the world of things. He is less than evil since it is outside of Him, being anti-concretion. God is more than

---

86

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 45-47

87

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 179-181





the total order since he is its constructor. He is the God of possibility as well as actuality. God is not the only principle of the universe; there are abstract forms and subordinate principles also.

Whitehead and Wieman hold that right and wrong are absolute and so men can become good only as they have in themselves this order where each one shares in all, and all is (are) each one (personality and events and abstract forms). Men must be plus moral; they must have the esthetic in them, for to be esthetic is to be religious.<sup>88</sup>

In the next chapter he deals with the scientific test of this concept of God, and the results of his work are that though it is not new, (reminding us of a mixture of Plato, Aristotle and Liebnitz) this is the first time such a theory of God has been given a scientific base that will hold up in the face of scientific criticism.<sup>89</sup>

The question of whether this "principle of concretion" has any religious value is next considered. He says:

So we judge that if God be beauty, if God be love, if God be that which sustains, makes possible and promotes the most secure and satisfying and abundant life of man, God must be the principle of concretion. (90)

Further, this principle is feasible in regard to evil as it

---

<sup>88</sup>The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 181-190 (Wieman would agree with the last statement only if "esthetic" were meant to include the moral order, as well as that of pure beauty in art and love.)

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., pp. 191-197

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 200



is empirically seen; it, too, is concrete; it tears down and opposes God, both in fact and in Whitehead's explanation of evil. The final test, religiously, is whether this God of Whitehead's can be proven in religious experience. Wieman says yes, for if God is the principle of concretion then all being converges on the individual, all things come to focus in him.

.....and God becomes an intimate and vital actuality, requiring an experience more rich in content than the moral and conceptual alone can afford.

The esthetic order, as all inclusive, and Whitehead's God are thus vindicated, but not without the moral and conceptual order, which Wieman sees to be very important, but he realizes that esthetic rightly understood is the far more inclusive term to use.<sup>91</sup>

He concludes this chapter on the religious test by saying:

Religion even more insistently and profoundly than science must search for objective and certain fact concerning the inherent nature of things. For God is in the inherent nature of things. (92)

91

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 201-205 (The distinction or clarification of just what the esthetic order is is vague. However Wieman senses the difficulty, (p210) and attempts an explanation when he says that either we need a broader term that takes account of the strenuous and hard in religion, or we must use esthetic in the broadest possible way to include these elements. pp.219-211)

92

Ibid., p. 212



The discovery of God is fundamental to the whole religious philosophy of Wieman. To learn more of God and the way in which He works is his ever searching question. There is a tentative element here, since he cannot be committed to a final definition of God because we don't know all there is to know as yet. God is supremely worthwhile for all men, that we know; but the quest for more knowledge is slow and we cannot be dogmatic in what we have found. In this search for God he formulates his all-important theory of value:

.....that connection between enjoyable activities by which they support one another, enhance one another and at a higher level mean one another. (93)

This means an organic functioning of all things that religious experience must bring into focus. Supreme value then, is the growth of meaning and value since meanings are the ultimate that can be found in the organic relations in the universe. God, he says, is this supreme meaning since through him do all connections have meaning between all worthwhile activities. Only as we yield to this growth do we have value in our lives and appreciate it. If we try to dominate this value (God) then we lose value in human experience.<sup>94</sup>

---

93

Wieman and Meland, op. cit., pp. 296-298

94

Ibid., p. 299





God must be a process of existence when we identify him with value. If the value is such because it is a possibility of existence, then it cannot be value apart from process, and some process of existence must be combined with some possibility, or impossibility, of existence to make our object one of supreme devotion. Is then, the highest possibility of value in the one or the many? It is possible that it is the many; a system of values in which there are many enjoyments organized creatively to bring into existence more values than those that exist. These systems are seen to evolve and change, and we look further to find what keeps them going, what sustains the values in a system and promote their possibility. He therefore is driven to conclude that the very nature.....

.....of highest value shows that it must be unitary since it requires the unification of otherwise separate values. (95)

The highest value is a unity for all men at any time.

Wieman feels very keenly the problem of the limitation of God, and in a discussion with Robert Calhoun he brings out some very interesting points which confront an empiricist. The question arises over the fact of personality; does the nature of God culminate in personality, or is it above personality? Wieman points out that mind and personality are

---

<sup>95</sup> H. N. Wieman, "God and Value", in Religious Realism, pp. 159; 160-164



not like process, interaction and behaviour, but rather are limited while the latter are capable of infinite extension. Thus these concepts are selected and restricted; if we apply them to God, we restrict and limit Him. He shares with all other things process and interaction, but does He share mind and personality? Wieman's answer is no, since the summit of God is higher than mind and personality; when we try to apply such concepts to the divine we distort their meanings for they cannot comprehend the divine being or process. We know mind by what it does, and so it stands to reason that if God does more than mind and different things than mind, then he must be both more than mind and different from mind. Wieman maintains this is the way the evidence points based on an empirical approach to the problem.<sup>96</sup>

God's work is that of organic connections, the growth of meaning and value. This is work that man cannot do, he can only serve it. Concluding he says:

Since God's way of working is so different from that of Mind, we feel that God is not only more than mind, he is more than we can think. (97)

In his latest work that we have consulted, on the conception of God, Wieman says that it is true that God

---

96

H. N. Wieman, "God Is More Than We Can Think", Christendom, Vol. 1, 1935, pp. 432-433

97

Ibid., p. 442



must reveal himself in order to be known, but that this mediation is a kind of supernatural revelation, he denies. Then the problem arises is God perceived only or inferred. If He is inferred then the traditional proofs will have to be used to prove Him. Wieman denies this, and says that God is the kind of reality that can be perceived through the senses. (substantially what he said in 1926, in his first book)

The discussion then goes into the question of perception which he says is not in the mind alone but is a physical event.

A perceptual object is a structure of events which includes, among the events which enter into its structure, some which have the peculiar complexity of perceptual events. (98A)

Therefore there are happenings within us, and certain things that happen to us, which, when the proper meanings are developed, have the form of perceptual events and have a "structure of interrelatedness which can be identified with the structure of creativity, that structure which generates value".<sup>98B</sup>

God is hidden from some people. He cannot be perceived by them for they approach the whole problem in the

---

98A-B

H. N. Wieman, "Can God be Perceived?", Journal of Religion, Vol. 22-23, 1942-43 (Vol. 23) pp. 24; 25-27





wrong way. On the other hand, those who know Him have true revelation.

Revelation is the development, in some strand of history and in some community, of those meanings, of those perceptual events, and the structured interrelation of events, whereby God can be known.(99)

Only as men use these events to achieve knowledge will they perceive God. God remains hidden when men do not see His creativity, the supremacy of His value, and instead set their own as highest; then they sin.

Myth and theology must be kept in their right places and in the right relation to life and the cultural development of man, else they will confuse the issue of the perception of God. Theology is not a substitute for perception, and neither is myth. The job of philosophy of religion is to clarify the strands and keep from the path to perception of God the entanglements of theology and myth incorrectly used.<sup>100</sup> In spite of the difficulty his final statement is that God can be perceived. With that we leave his conception of God, right on the empirical rock from which we started.

### 3

Method is naturally one of the more important con-

---

99

"Can God be Perceived?" op. cit., p. 28

100

Ibid., pp. 28-32



siderations, perhaps it should have come first, but even before we can have method we need some kind of a theory of knowledge, and as Wieman's is so bound up with his conception of God we have outlined the two first.

In our discussion we should keep in mind what Wieman says in regard to science and religion on the level of method.

Religion needs the constraint, guidance and tests of scientific method just as much as scientific method needs the freedom, spontaneity, and creative impulsiveness of religious experience. (101)

Concerning the difficulty of the relationship between science and religion, Wieman points out that science has tried to narrow the experience down far too greatly.

So far as the claims of science are at fault, perhaps the greatest cause for maladjustment between science and religion has been the failure of the followers of science to see that science treats of only a very few of the objects that inhere in experience. (102)

The difficulty with science alone is that it goes after those limited descriptions of reality that will serve its purpose alone and no others. Science does not see many possibilities in experience because it is not looking for them. Man is constantly experiencing those things with which science

---

101

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 132

102

Ibid., pp. 163-165



is not dealing: the masses of experience, the totality, the wholeness and the oneness. For this reason science is not an adequate interpreter, per se, of reality at all. Science fails to describe that which we love; in fact, it is even hard to test such things as personality by scientific tests since it cannot even describe such things adequately.<sup>103</sup>

He says that it is in the realm of common sense that we know religious things, God. This is an area in which we think in a blundering fashion, it is true, but it is the area in which only an omniscient science could portray what we mean, not present science. These common sense realities are far beyond the description of science and yet Wieman holds that they exist since we have experience of them. God signifies what is supremely worthwhile, whether known or unknown. So our experience, and our method is at the same time scientific and extra-scientific for gathering data. For:

This immediate experience of the 'whole occurrence of nature' may signify time and space and color and sound, for all these are ingredients of nature; but it also signifies God. And its divine significance does not exclude the others, nor the others the divine. (104)

Scientific method helps us disentangle from the mass

---

103

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 170-173

104

Ibid., pp. 174-175; 178





of experience the path that we wish to follow. There must be a method of simple selection if we are to organize our experience. Science reduces the necessary sensory data that we follow to its simplest elements. It sifts the data, retaining only what is essential in our thinking and inferences. This part with which science deals is not the world of everyday experience in a lump, for science does not have the time, nor even the method to deal with the whole, but only with the parts. Space-time relations are worked out for us by science since they are essential in experience which is in space-time. This limitation that science imposes is objected to by some; it is too piecemeal and partial; it limits what we find in love, in a kiss; it distorts and makes unenjoyable. Wieman senses this lessening of the capacity to enjoy by science, while increasing our efficiency in getting what we want. To offset this is the (hoped for) increase of art and religion in life; the personal touch must try to keep pace with the impersonal that brings us knowledge. This has not been the case in the past. Science has moved ahead, and art and religion have dropped back; man has become less personal and less religious.<sup>105</sup> (We must keep in mind that Wieman does not mean religion is not to be tested by science when he speaks of its limitations.)

---

<sup>105</sup>

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 183-188



In discussing the method of religion, the scientific method, we need some kind of a proposition with which to start. He suggests we start with this one:

God is that which yields the maximum security and increase of good, when lives are properly adjusted to him.

Now we must see what values this proposition has for experimentation as a method of religious inquiry.<sup>106</sup>

The proposition meets two experimental requirements; it points to something existent and going on, and thus we can have investigation and it states the most important feature of the object, its supreme importance for human living. The universe is constantly behaving in the sense that there is a pattern. The welfare of man depends upon his getting adjusted to this pattern, and so the whole object of religious experimentation is...

.....to discover as clearly and fully as possible this particular behaviour which is going on in the universe. (107)

We have, then, the experimental method of common sense when the sciences cannot give us more exact knowledge of some proposition. However, we must consider the fact that experimental living is dangerous since it involves the whole of life and is not like a pure scientific experiment

---

106

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 59

107

Ibid., pp. 60; 61-62



in which there is no life involved in the outcome. But if we would look into the universe and find God and the behaviour of that universe so that we may live better, then we have to stake a lot on the chance that we may win....or lose! Jesus was truly testing an experiment on love. He staked His all on it and the answers are not even yet all in; was He right? We may have a part in determining that answer as we venture into the "scientific" method that Jesus used; the experiment yet needs to be verified by us in our experience.<sup>108</sup>

Scientific method, to continue its definition, is simply a narrowing of the use of intelligence as a method. Religion cannot use the scientific method in its most refined sense, it is true, but it can use intelligence which is a part of the scientific method. This type of intelligence will be guided by the scientific method, not by the methods used long ago. We need new methods of intelligence to use today that will aid us in our search for truth. We need a method that is at least comparable in reputation to the method of the sciences in the area in which they deal. There are, then, methods of intelligence for religion, and these do not mean the cultivation of the emotions for religious experience but, rather, the rich and integrating experiences which result in religious appreciation. We need







to put emphasis on the method of religious experience as well as on the experience itself.<sup>109</sup>

The method of religious experience may come before the experience that will make a change in our lives by preparing us for the experience, or it may come afterward. At least to some extent, religious method must follow the experience as a test of value. Religious method thus has three functions: (1) to prepare the individual for insight in the experience, or insight into the nature of the experience. (2) The new insight must be tested as it comes in experience, and illusion and truth must be separated. We need investigation to test our insights, to develop concepts of truth, and then further to test these concepts. The testing must be social and cooperative. We must use the past as well as the present, as found in history, sociology, and in the Bible. (3) There must be a bringing to the practical of the possibilities for good found in the experience; this is the constructive phase. This is the part in which the big job is to remake men and the world.<sup>110</sup> He warns us that the three phases of religious method must be kept together; they do not work in parts, but as a whole. Science in this method is only a tool for us to use. It is unthinkable that we should leave

---

<sup>109</sup> H. N. Wieman, Methods of Private Religious Living, N.Y.: Macmillan, 1929, pp. 196-203 (We may note in this connection that while Macintosh and James put the emphasis on the experience itself, Wieman goes one step further when he insists we must be concerned with the method of the experience in religion. Also we must guard against confusing the experience itself, with the method of the religious experience, they are distinctly different.)

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-212



solely to the narrow scientific methods found in "pure" science the highest integration of the individual to God and the universe. Science may be used for good or evil; religion is always for good, for integration, for new meanings, connections of values, and the more abundant life. This is the scientific method but with the "more" added to it by religion. So power to solve problems in the real sense of the word is that which is gained by "intelligence", for in it we see the possible solution of problems that the narrower scientific intelligence alone may not be able to solve.<sup>111</sup>

Finally, in this experimental method we have discussed there is room for the right kind of intuition. This intuition of which Wieman speaks is that which brings to light new problems, new ideas and suggestions, but (and here is the essence of his idea) these intuitions are no more than wild guesses until they have been tested by experience and thus known for what they really are. Intuitions held down and guided by the scientific tests of sensory observation experimental behavior, and rational inference may be true if they conform to one another and other proven truths after having been tested.<sup>112</sup>

---

111

Methods of Private Religious Living, pp. 212; 217-219 ("Intelligence" is here used in a very broad and inclusive sense, including intelligent handling of religious experiences.)

112

"God Is More than We Can Think", op. cit., pp. 433-434





We have discussed the empirical aspects of Wieman's scientific method. Let us for a moment consider the place of abstraction in the religious method. Particularly do we see the necessity of the method of abstraction in dealing with God. We know God somewhat in the same manner as we know the foothills of a range of mountains, as far as empiricism is concerned. We know also in the case of the foothills that something more is there, the full hills; in the case of God the full height of God rises on beyond what we empirically know. Thus he says that this "more" we know is there cannot be known by empiricism, at least in the case of God, but can only be known by abstraction from the wholeness that we know is there in a vague sort of way. We base this abstraction not only on the vague awareness, but also on the empirical base of what we do know; thus we abstract from two places, the whole and the part. We may be sensorily aware of the totality without perceiving it to the point of knowledge; our abstractions must square with what we sensorily know of the whole, as well as squaring with the empirical base that we do know.

Abstractions, thus, are essential to religious method, as much so as rigid empiricism if we would get anywhere. But let it be always kept in mind that, for Wieman, these abstractions must be tested, even as intuitions and





all other forms of knowledge, before they can be called true.<sup>113</sup>

Our method is scientific, enlarged and clarified by the use of a renovated intelligence, religious beliefs as tools, religious experience to give us the data, and experimentation by which to check; we are, with these weapons, armed as a good empiricist should be in the Wieman tradition.

4

In spite of what we said in the introduction to this chapter, Wieman does not give a great deal of space to a discussion of metaphysics pure and simple as does Macintosh. His metaphysics is seemingly implied in much that he says, although at times one wonders if he is not trying to get away from it. However, be this as it may, it is apparent that most of what he has to say in this field is not his own original thought, but a close following of Whitehead's metaphysical constructs.

Wieman says that the metaphysics of both religion and science must be the same, since they are both derived from immediate experience, but he recognizes that it is (and will be) hard to get the two areas together via metaphysics. The difficulty seems to lie in the fact that the basic con-

---

113

"God Is More than We Can Think", op. cit., pp. 436-437



cepts of both religion and science in this field need to be re-formulated if a metaphysics is to be found that will be satisfactory for both fields. This work in metaphysical constructs must be done by the specialist in the field. Then the philosopher will examine what has been done to look for consistency or inconsistency in the system and point out corrections to be made as well as what further needs to be done.<sup>114</sup>

There has been much tearing down and revamping of metaphysics in the past few years, he says. The work in the area of emergent evolution, in the theory of relativity in physics, and the metaphysics of Whitehead all point to the transformation and change that the world of thought, and thus metaphysics, is going through and each suggests further lines of development. (Remember he is writing in 1925-26). Whitehead offers the most fruitful future, Wieman believes.<sup>115</sup>

Religious metaphysics needs to recast its concepts of personality and purpose, which it has long felt must be somehow at the root of reality. This may be perfectly true, and recast into new language to fit modern sciences religious metaphysics may be better understood, but as it now stands the categories of interpretation are inadequate metaphysical

---

<sup>114</sup>

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 149-150

<sup>115</sup>

Ibid., pp. 150-154



explanations. What the future may bring along this line no one can tell, but it must be remembered experimental verification and the values of immediate experience are the only supports that metaphysics can have. One may speculate all he cares to, but unless his speculations will stand the tests mentioned above, they will be of the nature of dreams. Metaphysics to be of any value at all must be concrete and capable of test.<sup>116</sup>

Metaphysical knowledge is perfectly possible, says Wieman, in spite of what critics may say, providing that by it one does not mean the transcendental, since all knowledge is through experimental living. The experimental process verifies the beliefs in metaphysics outside of philosophy, but only in religion can we find the verification and sanction for profound metaphysical probing, and metaphysical beliefs which are the result of this probing, into the nature of the universe.<sup>117</sup> This section, I feel, makes us increasingly aware of the empiricism of Wieman and the depth to which it really goes in his system and to his complete adherence to what he has laid down as to truth, verifica-

---

116

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 154-155; 158 (This is more rigid than Macintosh, but for that reason more capable of truth, we would say. For further discussion of metaphysics than we have here, the section on God concerns itself in part with this important problem.)

117

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 15-16





tion, and beliefs.....Perhaps our reason for terming Wieman a "rigid" empiricist is becoming more evident.

## 5

We turn now to a consideration of truth, its verification, and its place in philosophy according to Wieman.

He makes this initial definition of truth:

By experimental truth we mean a belief that has been experimentally tested until sufficient evidence has been gathered to justify one's accepting it as true. (118)

We cannot make the bald statement that the experience we have is true, for experience alone and without concepts cannot be verified; thus we cannot tell whether it is true or false. Beliefs that cannot be experimentally verified cannot make the claim that they will yield certain results when they are applied in life, or in certain experiments. What, then, is truth? Truth consists of those concepts which....

- (1) involve the claim that certain consequences will result when they are experimentally applied in the form of theories or beliefs, and
- (2) those concepts which do yield these consequences when experimentally applied under the right conditions and with the right implications. (119)

---

118

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 16

119

Ibid., pp. 21-23; 24



We have spoken of the use of concepts in finding truth. What further may be their value? Concepts help us to discern certain features of the world from confused masses of experience. They help us to discern that which lies beyond our immediate awareness. Also they help us to infer from the data of experience some of the things that never enter into our awareness, such as ether waves. Without concepts, then, not only would truth be unknown to us, but the world both present and past would be impossible to know.

Concepts have a further value which is esthetic; by quickening the emotions they give us certain mental images; they produce joy and sorrow and pleasure. They have an organizing value, as they indicate to us a whole system of concepts. In this sense they are implicative rather than descriptive and thus their truth is not always as it is in the description of an event.<sup>120</sup>

The misuse of concepts leads to error. The misuse of them may lead us, for instance, to the illusion of pure being in the mathematical realm, which is obviously a confusion between concepts of description and implicative concepts. He finally concludes that there is no realm of concepts separate from the interaction of the organism and the environment that we can verify. Concepts then have meaning

---

120

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 217-220



as symbols of the present, and also as.....

.....more extensive development of  
symbols and logical transformations. (121)

Pure science is not interested so much in truth as in the pursuit of it. It is not interested in the truth of objects that are of supreme human importance, unless those objects fall within its specific field. When truth is once found the pure sciences are no longer interested in it, but religion is, for the maximum power of religion would be attained if its concept-truths could be verified. If science were to find out how man could best adjust to God, it would drop the study once the answer had been found; religion would take over the truth and attempt to utilize it to its advantage. Religion wants final truth; in this science may be able to help, perhaps more by chance than deliberate effort.<sup>122</sup> Here is a fundamental distinction, according to Wieman, in the way that science goes after certain truth and uses it and what religion will do with truth if it finds it. I feel that there is occasion for misunderstanding here, for science does want final truth in its specific field. Wieman seems to mean that science is not interested in totality generally, and thus would not utilize a truth of this nature if

---

121

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 220-226

122

Ibid., pp. 232-233





it found it but would consider utilization not in the field of pure science.

The relationship between philosophy and religion in the matter of method and truth is important. Wieman does not think that philosophy can take the place of religion, but that it can be of great use in clarification on the concepts religion uses. Science and everyday living are likewise of value to religion, for the former gives us a critical method of determining concept verification and the latter refines and clarifies concepts on a broader scale than either philosophy and science, though not in such analytical detail. Because of the wide area of religion, in the end it can do far more to verify concepts than can philosophy alone, but all three, philosophy, science, and everyday life must be used if religious verification of concepts is to be satisfactory. Although philosophy is valuable to get obstructions out of the way, to help keep the concepts clear and thereby prevent religion from falling into disuse, it is in the end the handmaid of religion and no more.<sup>123</sup>

6

More specifically, we now turn to a discussion of the nature, function, and emergence of religion. In spite

---

123

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 242; 253



of the fact that religion is one of the oldest interests of man, says Wieman, it is one the least differentiated and distinct of his activities. Religion has always been merged with art and morals in culture. So we may well ask, does religion have any unique individuality of its own? The answer is, yes, but where? Wieman says that today religion is emerging into her own distinctive elements. Religion can no longer be the undergirding of all things with little individuality. Today with the study of religion emphasized by so many, the separation of church and state, and the increasing self-consciousness of religion, it is coming into its own individuality and "differentness".<sup>124</sup>

The growth of religion points out its distinctive nature as it progresses. Man's beliefs in religion have not been fashioned in the past by mere tradition and custom but by the scientific laws of experience as well. He defines religion:

.....religion is precisely our response to the undefined significance of this total wealth of experience when we take it as a single datum signifying the supreme and total object with which we have to do in all the conduct of our lives. This is religion when religion becomes sufficiently differentiated from the several branches of culture to show its unique character and distinctive function. (125)

---

124

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 356-360

125

Ibid., pp. 361-368; 368



To find out what religion really is we must go the highest forms of it rather than to the lowest, for it is in these higher forms that we find it best differentiated and thus easier to understand. This is not a simple matter, for religion with its own simple function in life completely differentiated from other functions has not appeared as yet, but says Wieman; it is still on the way.<sup>126</sup>

Religion in the ultimate is man's attempt to adjust himself to the divine in the universe that he may live abundantly, for in God the maximum security for life is to be found.<sup>127</sup> Therefore, the function of religion in human life is creative, since for man to live according to God is the most important thing in life. As G. B. Smith sums up Wieman:

The function of religion is to bring us face to face with the totality of reality. To induce a mystic awareness in us of the vaster and more profound realm in which we live, that science alone cannot confront us with. (128)

or as Wieman adds, and goes further:

He may be worshipping an idol but it is worship. If it be the true God however, or that which approximates the true God, his worship will arouse and organize

---

<sup>126</sup> Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 373; 381

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., pp. 379-381 (G. F. Moore suggests that Christianity is the highest synthesis of the highest religions, but Wieman feels he is not clear as to what he means on this point.)

<sup>128</sup> G. B. Smith, Review of Religious Experience and Scientific Method, Journal of Religion, Vol. 6, 1926, p. 640





his impulses for the farthest swing  
of constructive achievement of which  
he is capable. (129)

May not this be an argument for Christianity, as giving us knowledge of the true God, and thus motivating the best achievement in man? It seems that Wieman may have this in mind as a justification for Christianity's spreading.

In another book he defines religion again:

(it is).....man's acute awareness of  
the realm of unattained possibility and  
the behaviour that results from this  
awareness. The acute awareness is re-  
ligious experience. (130)

Religion, however, is a sham unless it involves critical and cautious experimental adjustment of one's life as to how to live in harmony with the something that sustains in the total environment. Because of this factor, and because religion includes all of life, the experimental process is more radical than in any other field. Religion attempts to find the best and avoid error in all the areas of man's adjustment to his environment and that which sustains it. It peers into his personal loyalties, fears, and loves because of the inclusiveness of the values it seeks.

Religion, however, is not to be confused with morality. Morality deals with the definable good and the

---

129

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 383

130

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 135



avoidance of it, but when it begins to explore the field of the less definable it takes on the character and nature of religion. Religion, on the other hand, is not moral when it only deals with cosmic good and evil, and does not bring this to bear on men. True religion needs to be grounded in morality, and morality needs the vision and the realms of religion to deal with to keep it alive.<sup>131</sup>

Religion seeks to integrate all of life in terms of the highest ends and ideals, incorporating into this the motive power for art and other cultural achievements. Life is full of specialization; religion seeks to bring all things together in the search for the best adjustment and integration for all things that can be found. The problem for religion is to find the behaviour of the universe and make the best human adaptation to it that will yield the most good. The good will be found in the interaction of all things, personal, social, past, present and future. The awareness of this fact is religious experience.<sup>132</sup>

Religion that springs from the primary experience is dangerous and valiant, but we must bear in mind that

When religion becomes second-hand, when it becomes institutionalized and traditional, it may take on a character exactly opposite to that which we have portrayed. (133)

---

<sup>131</sup> The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 136-138

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., pp. 139-141

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 144



Even so, second hand religion, at least in part, is inevitable. We live in a society and culture in which experiences we are prepared for the first hand experiences of religion. Second-hand religion has its place (the church) but it needs to be constantly regenerated by the primary and innovating religion of experience. If primary religion is not found in a society, religion degenerates and disappears into magic and superstition. (Obviously "traditional" religion whose only justification is that it comes from the past, is being condemned at this point.)

Primary, or first-hand religion, does not accept as its data the past because it is the past; it seeks to find what experiences are in the present; if they are conditioned by the past, well and good, but they must not be solely of the past. Primary religion is exploratory in trying to find the best in this age in the vastness of the universe and God.

Religion of this original sort is man's groping into the unexplored possibilities of all being in order to win ultimate salvation and escape ultimate destruction. (134)

The highest religion is that religion which has the most truth, the best concepts that can stand verification, and that religion which provides the most variety and







widest area of interests, combining greater mutuality with more liberality.<sup>135</sup> If this is Christianity, then it is the highest religion (Wieman does not say what he thinks at this point).

In the article, "God and Value," Wieman says that any man who follows any art or science should do so religiously, in order that he may see the contribution of religion in making the adjustment of man to the total structure of value which is God. Religion must keep the wholeness of life alive. Philosophy formulates a structure of existence and the possibility of value and therein religion demands devotion to this possibility. Religion does more; it tests the possibility in its devotion. Religion is not devoted to any one theory but to structure and possibility which theory tries to explain. Philosophical structures may be fallible in theory, but religious devotion to the possibility is true.<sup>136</sup>

## 7

Having considered the nature and function of religion, the next natural question is where does worship fit into all this, and what part does it play in religion for Wieman?

---

135

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 168-173

136

"God and Value", op. cit., p. 170



Worship has its place, even in science, but

Worship must absorb science, but it must go on beyond science. It must not contravene the verified conclusions of the scientific method, but it must not be narrowed down to a scientific knowledge pure and simple. For it is more than knowledge. It is love. (137)

How, then, can we be true to the scientific method and yet exceed its bounds in worship? Wieman says that by contemplation that means more than mere passivity we can do this. Contemplation is that experiencing which tries to get at the whole which is enlarging; it is getting the most out of an experience without altering the experience to be something that it isn't.

In the contemplative attitude we are receptive to all the experience which seems to pertain to the object. (138)

We cannot know God by merely thinking about him; this is not the worshipful attitude. If science and religion would work in the right relationship, religion would profit in worship by what science has to add. In contemplation mere scientific inquiry is enriched by concrete experience which makes the object and event more than is understood by

---

137

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, p. 65

138

Ibid., pp. 66-69 (The practical and theoretical attitudes are valuable, but tend to exclude too much of the whole experience of the object.)



science alone. The contemplation of many experiences, the whole, more than the specific, brings religious experience to its richest and fullest development. However, even contemplation must be dominated by some kind of a motive; it needs to be directed else there is waste of experience.

.....contemplation is precisely the thinking which is dominated by the motive to integrate experience more widely and completely. Thus God..... is necessarily that object however unknown, which must bring human life to maximum abundance when man makes proper adjustment to him. (139)

It is at this point that mysticism and the mystical method enters the picture. (We shall have more to say of this in the next section.) Mysticism is the form of immediate experience; contemplation is a form of cognition. Contemplation thus stands between practice-theory and mysticism. There are well defined beliefs and a retention of the cognitive elements in contemplation; it goes further than science and not as far as mysticism which loses all the cognitive elements.<sup>140</sup>

Wieman admits the value of mysticism in spite of what other empiricists have said, mainly because he thinks they do not understand what true mysticism is. Mysticism is not good for determining truth, but as a method of pure ex-

---

139

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 73-74; 75

140

Ibid., p. 76





perience it is unparalleled. The contemplative attitude can most easily use the data of mysticism to form concepts to be tested and thus carry over the mystical experience into action which is its only true end.

.....we can increase our knowledge of Him (God) by contemplation, which draws on mysticism from the one side and scientific method from the other. (141)

Actually it seems to me that Wieman simply redefines the term mysticism to a meaning more like that of contemplation than the historical idea of mysticism allows. The redefinition is good if it is followed.

Continuing the discussion of worship, he says:

Worship is the way we seek to organize and adjust that totality of habits, making up the self, to that feature of environment upon which we are dependent for the best that life may ever attain. (142)

Through worship we adapt ourselves to the environment by the selection and organization of experience. Worship is thus at the heart of religion since it seeks among the many experiential factors of living the most important ones for our good.

The steps in worship are important: the first is exposure to God, the second is diagnosis of what our needs

---

141 Religious Experience and Scientific Method, pp. 77-85

142 The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, p. 69



are and our willingness to adapt ourselves, and the third is reconstruction of our lives based on the former steps.

Prayer, he continues, is not so much the words or the ideas that we have and use, but the attitudes that are generated by the words and ideas that become habitual with us. Thus we adjust the total personality, not just a part of it, to God by habit. He senses that some will say this is simply auto-suggestion. It is, but it is more. Prayer, being the attitude that we start in ourselves by the words we utter, makes it possible for God to do for us what he can only do as we make the initial effort to adapt ourselves to him and the environment of the universe. Prayer is the admitting of an outside element into our lives, by first preparing ourselves for it.<sup>143</sup>

Finally there are two requirements that must be met before worship will be effective. The first is honesty with the self and with God, and the second is that we must be specific in our diagnosis and in knowing and stating what our needs are. These two things must be cultivated in private where we can open our hearts to God. The art of worship will not be developed overnight, but must be worked at. The final outcome will be real prayer in which our attitudes are so set that we will know God more intimately

---

143

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 70-74; 76



than ever before.<sup>144</sup>

In the act of worship we must be able to relax and call to mind the vast possibilities for good which are found in the integrating process that we call God. We must face squarely the chief problems with which we are confronted, not avoiding or hiding from them, for God cannot help us if we are not sincere. We must be willing to change and make positive adjustments that show our sincerity of purpose; otherwise, worship is of little use. This involves auto-suggestion as explained above, for as we put ourselves in the right attitudes, as we try and adjust to God, then we will see the value in worship and prayer.<sup>145</sup> Prayer is empirical and pragmatic; it is real; it proves itself if we are willing to make the commitment that makes possible true prayer.

8

Since mysticism figures so prominently as a method of worship for Wieman it is necessary that we consider it a bit further. The states of mysticism may be induced either

---

144

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 79-82

145

Methods of Private Religious Living, pp. 22-35 (Most of this chapter has been discussed in earlier books in a somewhat more technical vein, and we have covered it more from that angle.)





naturally or artificially. Extreme shock, disaster, a sense of danger, or frustration may bring on a state of mysticism. On the other hand, some people can throw themselves into the mystical state at will when they approach worship. ("Mystical state" in his meaning of the term) The characteristics of mysticism are:

.....intense stimulation producing  
vivid consciousness, yet without any  
integrated system of response. (146)

In the mystical state nothing can be cognized since there is no definite response of perception, only sensory experience. Mystical experience comes when the bonds are down, when there are no rigidly defined limits to sense experience and when habitual systems of response do not function. This experience is valuable for two reasons. In the first place, it frees us from the confines of habit that regulate our lives so rigidly and makes possible more radical experimentation in religion. Second, it gives us a new experience of the ultimate substance from which new worlds may be developed by showing us new ways to react to this ultimate. Thus there is a selection made that is impossible under the ordinary conditions of life that increases our possibilities for rich lives in the future.<sup>147</sup>

---

146

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 153-154

147

Ibid., pp. 155-157



The mystical experience may be either good or bad; from it we may go to the bad or to the better after having experienced something of the ultimate meaning in the world. This, then, is one method of religious experience, experience that is essential if we are to ever find the best for without experience we will never find ultimate meaning of good. If God is the object of this experience, then He in some manner enters into the supreme good, as He is at least ultimate cause; the adjustment to Him makes possible the best of all worlds.

The mystical experience provides the conditions needed for the radical kind of personal experimentation through which the supreme good must be sought. The immediate good of the mystical experience itself is not the supreme good. On this point many mystics have erred. But when the mystical experience is used to practice religious experimentation, it is an indispensable means to the attainment of the best possible world. (148)

In his book, The Methods of Private Religious Living, Wieman goes into a long discussion of mystical experience, not mystical philosophies. He starts out by discussing types of worthless mysticism; Yoga, muddle-headedness, hallucination and others. He then discusses three more types that are partly good and partly bad. These are the holding of a belief until it results in some kind of



experience, awareness of mystery, and the sudden inflowing of peace and power.<sup>149</sup>

The last two types of mystical experience are what he considers the best and are worth our attention. The first of these is that experience which seems to show us the integration of all things and we learn how all things work together in connective relations. It is the sudden feeling of knowledge of process itself and integration for good.

The next type, and perhaps the most important contribution Wieman makes along this line, is problem solving mysticism. If we cannot solve a problem by the old methods and we need a new idea before we can solve the problem, this type of mysticism may help us. We need to relax, to be almost disorganized so that the old lines of thought will not exclude a new idea that may come. The mind must be empty of distinct ideas and passions and motives, but we must keep our consciousness about us; it is not complete passivity. This method takes time; mystical experiences do not come to solve problems by pushing a button. In addition to the above, there are certain other prerequisites we must meet before we may logically look for this kind of experience. There must be an honest admittal that other methods of solution will not work out, after hav-

---

149

Methods of Private Religious Living, pp. 163-183







ing tried them. The individual should have a richly stored mind from his many and varied experiences in life. The problem must be as well formulated as possible in one's own mind before entering the state of relaxation and quiet. This method takes practice; meditation and worship each day are suggested as the best aids for creating in us the possibility for this kind of experience when it may be needed in problem solving.<sup>150</sup>

Wieman defines this type of mysticism:

It consists in exposing one's self to the stimulus of a problematical situation with a mind free of all bias and preconception, and waiting in this state, or returning periodically to it, until there dawns upon the mind that integration which will solve the problem. (151)

The best use of this method is in getting better adjusted to the integrative processes of the universe and to know them. Reaching out into the unexplored fields to which religious problems will lead us if we will follow is the resultant of this kind of experience.<sup>152</sup>

Wieman would add that the results of this experience must be tested before they are valid, thus keeping close to the empirical base from which we have started. The

---

<sup>150</sup> Methods of Private Religious Living, pp. 184-193

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 194

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 195



tests must be for both general and specific experience. We might call this type of mysticism, "empirical mysticism". It is at this point in Wieman's philosophy of religion in general, that, it seems to me, there is the best hope of building further than empiricism. In other words, this point, grounded in empiricism, offers the jumping off place for further exploration and study in religion. I am not saying that this is the only place or direction empiricism can go, but it is one that seems suggestive of great value and one that follows logically all that we have said concerning Wieman. Perhaps it will be a trend of the future. However, it must be said I know of no other empiricist who has taken up problem-solving mysticism and gone on from there, using it as the starting point "beyond rigid empiricism".<sup>152B</sup>

## 9

We have completed what might be called the essentials in his empirical method and in this and the next section we shall deal with some of Wieman's later and more practical work. In this section we will deal with the article, "Some Blind Spots Removed", (1939) in which he seems to adopt an almost traditional position in his discussion of his topics. In fact, we may wonder where his empiricism has

---

<sup>152B</sup> R. C. Miller suggests that Macintosh's Right Religious Adjustment may fit into this category of problem-solving mysticism. Implicitly, perhaps yes.



gone. However, I feel he retains it when we understand what he is trying to say; he has simply seen some of the values in tradition and is trying to show how they fit in today.

Wieman begins by saying that he is using traditional symbols much more, not because he is becoming more orthodox, but because much of the superstition about them has been cleared away. He also feels that because we are generated from the past we are quickened by the symbols that come from the past. He concludes his apologia by saying that he had to understand the symbols in his own heart and mind before he could use them sincerely; this he could not do ten years ago.<sup>153</sup>

Sin: is a disparity between our highest ideals and the concrete goodness demanded by God in the immediate situation. The feeling of sin within us is generated by our going against God; exactly how we do that we do not always know. Even living up to ideals is sinning for ideals can never contain the richness of God in them, for they are man made.

Even when these ideals are impossible possibilities, it is a sin to set them up as supreme.

Morally we can live by our ideals, but it is not Christian

---

153

H. N. Wieman, "Some Blind Spots Removed", in Contemporary Religious Thought, (ed.) Thomas Kepler, Nashville, Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1941, p. 196





living. Christian living is living by the sovereignty of God and all the richness that that implies.<sup>154</sup>

Grace: is that which God puts into every situation above and beyond what man can add to it. We may not see the fullness in value in a given situation, the grace that is there, because we are blind. Setting up our own ideals we do not see what God is doing for us in the event. Of this he says:

I am pushing to the limit, as I never did before, the instrumentalism of all ideals. (155)

The Living Christ: The Grace of God is in Christ Jesus which makes for the living and vital and mutual enhancements of connections when others follow after him in the community. It is not the personality of Jesus which is so important, but the working of history that used His personality, God incarnate in the historical situation, operating as growth in one personality. This is true creative tradition.

It is the growth of connections of value which fill the world with depth and height of meaning if we could see and feel and grasp them in each concrete situation as they unpredictably emerge. (156)

---

154

"Some Blind Spots Removed", pp. 196-197

155

Ibid., p. 197

156

Ibid., pp. 197-198



### The Church:

The Christian church is an association of people which transmits a way of living that is controlled supremely by the grace of God. (157)

Symbols, ceremonies and doctrines sustain this way of living, but the way is the essential part. It is not a certain set of moral principles; it holds that all things may be changed to enter into the richest values in each situation; this is the construction of its personality or organism. God's will is not in formularies since each situation may be different. Although each local group is important, the church as a whole passes on what the grace of God is; this is the only bond that surrounds it.<sup>158</sup>

The Otherness of God: God is more than man, more than mind, more than we can think. He works concretely, which man cannot do. God is totally other; occasionally he breaks through the mists to man but he is soon obscured again.<sup>159</sup> (His position concerning God is here much like the one developed in the article "Can God be Perceived?")

In conclusion, he says that these changes have been brought about by a profound sense of sin and grace which earlier he had not understood. God is still the growth

---

157

"Some Blind Spots Removed", p. 198

158

Ibid., p. 199



of meaning and value and men must be able to perceive Him to know Him, in spite of His otherness. This is fundamental to his position.<sup>160</sup>

## 10

Wieman thinks the primary task of the church in this empirical, and yet religious, age is to give to all the world the work of Christ. In the past this has been done by preaching, visiting, the sacraments and other things; these aspects of doing the work should be kept but more must be added. The task cannot be done today or ever save in a community of believers; only where a person can pass on to the next person the truths and insights he has gained. In this community there must be three things: (1) Some who have committed themselves to Christ. (2) There must be some record, the Bible, by which men can keep their spirits true to the spirit of Christ. (3) It must be possible for men to interact and communicate with each other on those deeper levels where the spirit works. This last has been broken in the communities of the world, and it is the job of the church to heal the interacting connections between men.<sup>161</sup>

---

160

"Some Blind Spots Removed", p. 200

161

H. N. Wieman, "Primary Task of the Church", Christendom, Vol. 7, 1942, p. 516





It is also the job of the church to nourish each man in his community, for men cannot have interaction with the church of the world without the specific relations in the church of the community. The church must keep up with the state and industry and what they do for man in depersonalization, with its emphasis on the personal and interactive aspects of life. This is not to say that the church simply goes along with all the other parts of life; it is not just an auxiliary for what man wants; it is not a substitute for other things and not a means for preserving social order. These things may be part of the functions of the church, but they are not fundamental to its existence.

The church must cease trailing after other institutions and groups as substitute, subordinate, stop-gap and lackey. The church is called to a leadership second to none and in no sense comparable to or competitive with state or industry or school or theater or forum. When it assumes this leadership its great days begin and not before.....This is the one door through that wall of redimented collectivism into this life of freedom and personal fulfilment. (162)

In his latest book, Now We Must Choose, Wieman discusses the choices that are before us today and what we

---

<sup>162</sup> "Primary Task of the Church", p. 517 (Where does Macintosh give as much emphasis to the church as this? Even an empiricist sees the part it must play; even if he has been "rejuvenated", or less empirical, in this section as some might say.)



must choose if we want the best. In the last chapter he discusses the most important topic, the faith that has to be formulated and what the ingredients that faith must have for America and true democracy. He feels that faith, religious faith, is essential for living, and for the best in life, and thus the church, as we noted above, can play a great role in society if it will.

The ingredients for this vital faith that America, the church and individuals need are: (1) symbols which awaken religious consciousness when certain commitments are made; (2) the need for a body of doctrine which will try to give intellectual formulation to that depth and power and creativity that empiricism has not yet explored; whether that doctrine is really thought to be supernaturally revealed or not is unimportant here; (3) the institution which gives continuity and transmits the creativity, as we have discussed before, as being the only way to propagate the life of a community; and (4) specifications empirically and rationally reached concerning the nature of that which is most important for human living and what it may and must demand of us.<sup>163</sup>

This last he feels is the weakest point in the present formularies. It is one of the joys of reading Wieman

---

<sup>163</sup>

H. N. Wieman, Now We Must Choose, N. Y.: Macmillan, 1941, pp. 210-212



that he never loses sight of the empirical base from which he started. There are times when we may wonder if he is being empirical, but in the end he brings his argument back around to the need for test, experiment and verification of the truths, which is empirical, and yet, it seems to me, eminently practical and sensible.

# 11

Criticisms must now be made of Mr. Wieman. In these we shall deal specifically with Wieman, and not empiricism in general, as we tended to do in the last chapter.

We have noted that G. B. Smith reviewed the first of Wieman's books, Religious Experience and Scientific Method. In the main the review is one of praise, but Smith does make a few well placed criticisms. He wonders if the experience we cultivate in mysticism, for instance, will ever have the connection with science that Wieman seems to think that it will have. Again, Wieman seems to feel that the imperfectly stated feeling of reality that science seems to have, is the power of religion. Thus we wonder if perhaps the more precise definition of God to which science might lead us might not take away the power and vitality of religion. (Wieman answered this criticism in the book; I feel Smith did not read carefully enough) With these criticisms in mind, Smith then asks if Wieman really wants science





to formulate religious truth or if religious truth, as Wieman thinks it appears, is capable of being scientific? Smith feels that religion must be symbolic rather than scientific.

(Wieman swings more to this point of view in "Some Blind Spots Removed") He concludes, as he did in his review of Theology as an Empirical Science, that the harmonization of religion and science is not as easy as Wieman (or Macintosh) suggests.<sup>164</sup>

H. M. Kallen reviews Wieman's Wrestle of Religion with Truth, and is certainly not favorable; he says:

His philosophy of religion provides an apologetic for an abstraction drawn from no recognizable actual cult, an abstraction invented rather than discerned, inapplicable to any nameable faith which is a going concern. (165)

Kallen goes on sarcastically to reject any Whiteheadian metaphysics for an empiricist as being a "pathetic idealism" and thus not good for a ground on which to build anything. He condemns the "principle of concretion" and the "internal relations" theory of Whitehead that Wieman uses,

---

164

G. B. Smith, op. cit., p. 640 (Smith is far less favorable to Macintosh than he is to Wieman, and yet Wieman goes so much further it is hard to understand. Wieman answers the criticism concerning full truth about God in his next book, as we have tried to show.)

165

H. M. Kallen, Review of The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 25, p. 274



without giving any reason for his rejection of it. He goes on to say that Whitehead is no more than a rejuvenated Aristotelean and that this method for knowledge of ultimate cause is out of date and of no use.<sup>166</sup>

Wieman, he says, talks about religion but fails to analyze any actual religion. Worship is likewise discussed but Kallen can see no connection with the worship of which Wieman speaks and that which man really experiences as worship. Wieman speaks of substance, determinism, and ultimate cause as if science accepted those terms but science does not accept them today. He uses the term experimental in a sense science never uses the term; he means tentative by it; science does not. Wieman, he decides, is no better than a deist since he does not deal with such problems as providence, immortality and the goodness of God. Kallen seems to think Wieman says one religion is as good as another, but Christian missionaries have some "peculiar" kind of justification, even as religious education in the schools.

Wieman never says what God really is, other than that which is known in religious experience. He thus concludes that the book is worthless since there is vital religion aside from the "muddle-headedness" of Wieman. After all, Kallen says, religion is more than mere "assurance"

---

<sup>166</sup>

Kallen, op. cit., pp. 276-277



but Wieman does not see this and constantly confuses religious issues in dealing with fundamentals. How can his book make any contribution to vital living?<sup>167</sup>

S. G. Cole in criticizing Wieman's essay in Religious Realism, says that he (Wieman) shares with the rest of the writers of the book the easy-going optimism of the age. There is no recognition of the problem of evil, it being dismissed in a utilitarian manner, and yet the volume is supposed to be realism! (We deny that this is a fair statement of Wieman, cf. The Wrestle of Religion with Truth.) Cole goes on to say that the essay is ethically deficient, that Wieman has not taken into account the depersonalization factors of modern civilization, and yet he claims to be empirical!<sup>168</sup> Finally, says Cole, Wieman uses the concepts of natural sciences in explaining religious experience and forgets the social sciences and their concept of the content of religious experience and what the religious object is, thus the human factor in Wieman is sadly deficient in all respects in this essay.<sup>169</sup>

---

<sup>167</sup> Kallen, op. cit., pp. 277-278 (Kallen is too hard on Wieman, and perhaps it might be suggested that he has his "head in the mud" when he is writing this review. His criticisms for the most part we have discussed in the body of this chapter, and picked them for this reason.

<sup>168</sup> S. G. Cole, Review of Religious Realism, op. cit., Journal of Religion, Vol. 12, 1932, pp. 579-580 (The question of depersonalization is answered by Wieman in the "Primary Task of the Church")

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., (This criticism is also answered in later and fuller works)







In another rather discouraging essay concerning Wieman, we find these objections and criticisms of his method and philosophy of religion. Homer H. Dubs says of Wieman:

(He).....is a religious mystic, who has been bitten by contemporary skepticism of religion and who consequently endeavors to provide a method whereby the skeptic can still attain the values of religion. (170)

Wieman, he says, calls himself a naturalist and tries to stick to it. Whether he does or not is the question. He feels that Wieman does not define God any further than as a system, a process, and that when he is pushed on this matter he refuses to admit that God is any more than process in the system. In contending that God is a system of interaction Wieman avoids metaphysics but, according to Dubs, he increases the problem of accounting for the system. Wieman makes no answer to this point.<sup>171</sup>

Because of the inability to define God as any more than a process, Dubs says that Wieman's position is no more than atheistic humanism, which is distinguished by the fact that he uses the term God to differentiate and summarize those features that produce goodness, and in particular producing the highest good. Wieman does not stop with what is observable, says Dubs; he goes on to say that God is not many

---

170

Homer H. Dubs, "Religious Naturalism--An Evaluation", Journal of Religion, Vol. 22-23, 1942-43 (23, 43) p. 258

171

Ibid., p. 260



but one and departing from his starting naturalistic base, he tries to prove that God is one by identifying metaphysical and moral principles as does Whitehead. But, says Dubs, Whitehead's identity at this point is widely rejected by many, even among those who are naturalists.<sup>172</sup> Wieman has gone too far for the skeptic and what he would accept and, thus, on naturalistic grounds his theory is faulty. (Especially in the "identity" theory which is not empirical.)

The denial of the personality of God makes Him something of an unconscious teleology in the universe, a river of good. If this God is neutral, then may not man be the same, having no incentive to be anything different? This kind of a God cannot supply the deepest needs of man, and so for this reason, and because of all objections to a limited God, the philosophy and definitions of God of Wieman are unsuccessful and of no value for vital religious living.<sup>173</sup>

Naturalism, Dubs concludes, may produce certain fine values in the intellectual realm, but it cannot produce the greatest values that other types of Christianity have been able to produce. Wieman, he says, defeats himself at this point, for if life is the organization of the self around the highest values and goods, then Wieman's own life

---

172

Dubs, op. cit., pp. 261-262

173

Ibid., pp. 263-265



is integrated around that which is superior to his philosophical and religious theory.<sup>174</sup> (For Dubs sees in Wieman a religious man in his personal life, integrated for the most part around Christian ideals)

Macintosh says that Wieman has contributed much to our knowledge of God but that we must remember that he is basing all his definitive work on a one-sided process philosophy. That God is a unity, says Macintosh, is not in the realm of verified knowledge but that of "reasonable belief", thus his definitions of God are good summaries of the IMMANENT aspects of divinely functioning reality.<sup>175</sup>

The two major sets of the criticisms that are levelled against Wieman come from two opposing types of theologians and philosophers of religion. On the one hand, the humanists claim that Wieman gives the name God to a process that is simply human functioning in a wider realm, and that it is spiritual, not per se, but only because of its function in the human environment. On the other hand, the orthodox theists (all shades) say that God is not an activity, that he is not impersonal, and that Wieman seems

---

174

Dubs, op. cit., p. 265

175

Macintosh, The Problem of Religious Knowledge, pp. 165-169 (The point that Macintosh makes is interesting since it suggests the point at which some kind of harmony may be worked out of the two systems, even though at other points they seem to be opposed.)







to empty Him of all the qualitative aspects that are essential to a God who can be worshipped.<sup>176</sup>

The humanist objection cannot be met until a certain impasse' in the two ways of thinking can be resolved as regards man in his relation to his environment. There have always been those who have said nothing is superhuman and these have tended to call those things which they could not understand sub-human in the sense that eventually they can be overcome. On the other hand, the objection of the orthodox theists can be met. As the term personality comes to have new meaning, it becomes more apparent that the theists and Wieman mean about the same thing when they use the term. Wieman would agree with the theists that man and God can interact but he feels that in a strict philosophical sense the term personality applied here is only misleading and until it is further clarified another term had better be used.<sup>177</sup>

When we consider these objections carefully, we agree with Meland that Wieman can be defended and that the best defense may be seen in the fact that the lines of cleavage between the orthodox and the empiricist are not as great as would first appear. Dubs may be right; Wieman may not be a thoroughgoing naturalist, but in this there may be hope for

---

176

Wieman and Meland, op. cit., p. 300

177

Ibid., pp. 302; 305



developments that will break the narrower bonds of empirical naturalism in the search for religious truth and relations between man and God.

12

It is certain that Wieman is not out to defend any given ideas in religion but to find out what conceptions grow out of a critically interpreted religious experience. We may not be able to define God completely, but we live in a universe in which we are vaguely aware of him through certain stimuli, interactions, and experiences of totality. Science has defined its objects; religion must define its objects through experience tested and checked by experience and the methods of truth over and over again. Mystical experience may be valuable, but only as it is tested by experimentation to give it defensible concepts. This is emphasized over and over again in his books.

We need not only to correlate the results of the sciences, but also to add to them the insights of religion as to totality, for it will never be known in unrelated pieces. Therefore, we say that the function of religion is to bring us to increasing awareness of the vast universe in its totality. Smith concludes his review of Religious Experience and Scientific Method by saying that Wieman is aware of the need for new ideas in religion gained by open-minded



interpretation of facts. A theology erected along these lines will be eventually as empirical as the sciences and men will be able to find new ways of committing themselves to God when the old formularies no longer serve.<sup>178</sup>

Wieman, himself, says that he is not trying to make religion respectable by being empirical, but only trying to deal with the objective existential God and not merely our ideas of him. God, however, is supreme interaction and because man knows little about how that works, the way to knowing God will not be easy, but tedious and difficult.<sup>179</sup>

Religion is not just a belief; it is also vision and certainty. Man must have imagination, emotion, and conversion of the will to God in addition to intellectual certainty. The religious man knows that the universe is more than protons and electrons; that it contains within it something that is of more value than any other one thing gives him joy and hope. The vision of religion, however, includes the knocking off of the dirt and corrosion to get to the pure heart; that means intellectual work. But the end result will be a new sense of joy in worship in that we have found that which can claim all our attention in the present

---

178

G. B. Smith, op. cit., pp. 639-640

179

"Theocentric Religion", pp. 349-351





and point to greater possibilities in the future.<sup>180</sup>

It is true that what we have said about God in this chapter points to a minimum position; it does not even go as high as the "reasonable beliefs" of Macintosh but at least it is a position that is verified and can be known, so says Wieman. This, then, may be the barest base of empiricism, for we have only the facts that can be known, no more empirically. This experimental theology, in the opinion of Miller, is stimulating and suggestive of what the future may bring to us.<sup>181</sup> It is an original position, far more so than Macintosh, we feel (with Miller). If the future will vindicate what the present is doing remains to be seen!

---

<sup>180</sup> The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, pp. 125-131

<sup>181</sup> "Religious Realism in America", pp. 499; 501



## CONCLUSION TO PART II

Naturalism, and particularly that branch represented by the empiricism of Wieman, offers much hope for the future. It is still in a formative period and for that reason we must be careful not to judge too harshly or too quickly. Religious thought as a whole is in the process of transformation. What the eventual emergent will be, we cannot as yet say. Whether theistic naturalism will win the field, whether supernaturalism (regenerated) or humanism will, or whether some other philosophy or religion will come and overcome all three present possibilities, it is still too early to say. But whatever the outcome may be, we must all give ourselves to search for the common faith of all that will help all men.

The outlook is interesting; there are many possible trails in any one of these great divisions, some of which we shall discuss in the next chapter. But even so, the lines of development are not clear as yet,<sup>182</sup> and at best our lights flicker as we try to trace a path that will lead to greater good. This is OUR task and our responsibility. We must discern the future as best we can.

---

182

Wieman and Meland, op. cit., p. 305



We conclude Part II with this comment of Wieman's which seems to point to the problems and to the hopes of future empirical naturalism.

Before we can have a satisfactory naturalistic religion naturalism must outgrow the crudity of its beginnings with the crassly mechanistic and materialistic viewpoints that have prevailed. Such a beginning was inevitable....But those beginnings are being left behind.

All this, we believe, points to the slow but sure growth of basic presuppositions and methods which will bring forth a naturalistic religion to sustain, guide, and inspire human life toward the most worthwhile reality. (183)





PART THREE

THE FUTURE



## INTRODUCTION

We have progressed through the groundwork of empiricism from some of its early beginnings to the present, but history without some kind of interpretation is of little use to man.

We saw that empiricism in America started with the work of Stearns and Clarke, based on what had been done on the continent largely by Frank. In this early period we noticed that the emphasis was upon validating the traditional superstructure, rather than starting from the beginning and building up. The problem of the validation of truth and metaphysics were unknown problems; religious experience was fundamental, not the "how" of it.

In the works of James, we considered a little more carefully the need for the validation of concepts so that we know what is true and what is not. At this point we were confronted with "radical empiricism", the sort that made everything appeal to experience for its truth, combined with the so called pragmatic theory of truth as set forth by James. James, we recall, was not overly interested in metaphysics, probably because of his dislike for the German rationalists. In James we saw a complete overthrowing of any traditional theology in the statements that no matter what produces a religious experience, if one has one and it works, it is valid.



This was empiricism in extremis, but without the necessary refinements to make it applicable in a universal sense.

In the chapter on Macintosh, which opened the modern period, we discussed his method of trying to make theology an empirical science, and although we were aware that he was not entirely successful, we learned much in the sense of a refined epistemology, theory of truth, and the levels of belief for man. Macintosh while accepting, implicitly at least, much of what James said, realized the need for more careful study of the whole problem, that we may know the valid experiences from the invalid, and what we may believe with proof and what on top of that. We discovered that Macintosh was supremely interested in the theory of knowledge and insisted that critical monistic realism was the only theory giving us adequate and assured truths in any realm.

In discussing Wieman, we have seen that he even goes farther than Macintosh in limiting what we can really know about God. We find that he is not so much concerned with a theory of knowledge, as he is with how we can know God, the supreme "growth of meaning and value in the world". We were particularly concerned with Wieman's earlier work that stuck to a completely empirical base, and concluded that he had gone about as far as one could in getting concrete evidence for belief. Beyond that we could not be sure





what the future might bring, based on his base of empirical naturalism.

It is our job in this section to see what the future will hold. What is the nature of empiricism in the light of its long, and yet at the same time short, history? To accomplish this task, we plan to consider what three representatives of empiricism think is the future of philosophy of religion, and ultimately theology, in empirical thought.

In a sense we will be going beyond empiricism in some of what we say, and yet at this point it seems correct to add that the future of any constructive work lies in empiricism plus something else that of course is true to the presuppositions of empiricism.

Thus we shall discuss three men who point to the future, we believe. The first is E. R. Walker who is a more rigid empiricist than Wieman in his insistence that the future must not go beyond the limits of naturalistic empiricism. The second is J. B. Pratt whose Naturalism is suggestive as a mid position in philosophy of religion between Macintosh and Wieman. The third is R. C. Miller whose analogical theology based on an empirical substructure, we believe, holds great promise for the future of theology.



CHAPTER VI  
THE THREE POSSIBILITIES



## CHAPTER VI

### THE THREE POSSIBILITIES

#### 1

Edwin Walker starts his discussion by asking the question, can the empirical method deal with the problems of religion today by itself, or is some kind of mystic insight needed into the nature of the problem that empiricism, by definition, cannot have?<sup>1</sup> This in a sense is the problem of this chapter and it will be well for us to keep this question in mind as we progress.

Walker says these things are essential to the empirical method and the reason why it is better not to use the term scientific method:

Empiricism is a method common to the sciences as well as to philosophy, but it is not to be confused with the particular techniques of operation by which the method has been applied in the several sciences. (2)

There is an element of rationalism in empiricism, since, even in the recourse to human experience for the testing of certain hypotheses, formal reasoning must be done. There are, he continues, two limitations to this method: (1) there is no absolute verification of any proposition, for there is a

---

<sup>1</sup>E. R. Walker, "Can Philosophy of Religion be Empirical?" Journal of Religion, Vol. 19, 1939, p. 315

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 315-316





tentative quality about all knowledge; and (2) there is a bias in the use of any method and one is found in empiricism. However, this bias may be used to good advantage if it is understood and taken into account.<sup>3</sup>

Walker's method in dealing with his subject is to point out the various objections to empiricism. It is in the refutation of them we find his constructive work. Therefore, we must go through these objections.

(1) It is objected that empiricism is a method of abstractions and religion deals with concrete individuals. But, says Walker, in reality all an abstraction is is the separation of one element from a complex so that it can be understood and analyzed as it is in itself. It is not just the method of empiricism, but of all the realms of knowledge, since we must be able to deal with the specific to know what it is. The abstraction is the relation between the particulars and this relation is found by all types of knowledge. Thus it is not logical to criticize empiricism for a technique which other methods use also. Further, it is far worse to use a symbol such as the more traditional methods use, since one is apt to think that the symbol is a reality, and

---

3

Walker, op. cit., p. 316 (This bias may be found in the particular social situation or the personal environment of the individual which sets his thoughts in certain specific directions.)



not an abstraction, which is all a symbol can be.<sup>4</sup>

(2) Empiricism, being limited to sense perception alone, for its subject matter, is inadequate as is any method which claims sense perception as its essential grounding. In counteracting this objection, the author says that we must have sense perception, since any knowledge of universals and the particulars deduced from them, apart from specific experience, is faulty, and not an accurate designation of the actual. The pragmatic meaning of a symbol may be rich in meaning; it may give us new ideas; it may be very convenient to work with, but it, alone, gives no evidence of the actual being of the object, since our ideas may work just as well without the existence of the object proved.

The formal meaning of God may have meaning for the individual as the church defines Him, and as "authority" says He must be. But here there is no dependence on sensory data, and "authority" may not refer to an existent God at all. If, on the other hand, we say that God has existential meaning, then we mean that we have seen the relation between the symbol and the object. Observation and reason are essential in helping us define what existential meaning is, otherwise this existential existence may take place in a postulated supernatural realm that has no reality. This is the quandary we

---

<sup>4</sup> Walker, op. cit., pp. 317-320



end in if it is said we have no sense perception of God.<sup>5</sup>

Again we should not confuse the knowledge of the object with the fact of religious living, because we may give loyalty to a symbol alone. But knowledge is of use, for it guides behaviour in relation to the object when it is more than a symbol. It is true that knowledge will not produce behaviour towards an object, but it keeps behaviour from becoming blind, ineffective, undirected and unreasoning. If, then, we can have no sensory knowledge of God, the concept of God is no more than the pragmatic and formal meaning can give it; he is not an existential reality for all we know.<sup>6</sup>

(3) Values, say some, cannot be understood in terms of scientific concepts. This criticism takes two forms. One is to set up a separation between the realm of values and that of existence in metaphysics. This criticism is met by Wieman who, with the help of the metaphysics of Whitehead, shows that the objectivity of value can be harmonized with the structural nature of things. (We recall the criticism of this work also)

The second form of this criticism is made by those who say, "How can a quantitative method, such as empiricism,

---

<sup>5</sup> Walker, op. cit., pp. 322-324

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 324





be used to find qualitative things, such as values, for they are outside its realm?" But quantitative as the sciences have been, there has always been a bit of the qualitative in their methods.<sup>6B</sup> Scientific method is not limited to the quantitative, but only has dealt exclusively with it because of choice of procedure. (This does not contradict the above in the field of method) So Walker concludes that the empirical method can be used to deal with values, even as it deals with quantity in science. The only reason more has not been done in this field is because there has been no really adequate theory of values until the present, and even today there is still much to be desired.<sup>7</sup>

(4) The last criticism taken up in this essay is that made by some who say that the religious life is essentially one of commitment, while empiricism is essentially a tentative procedure. How can a religious man commit himself to a tentativeness? Is it practical?

Walker admits that empiricism is tentative but goes on to add that of all the methods in science or religion, empiricism is the only one that can find just what the un-

---

6B

One who is skilled in the techniques of the pure sciences read the rough draft of this thesis and at this point made the comment that science has never lost sight of the qualitative aspects of the universe!

7

Walker, op. cit., pp. 325-326



certainty in knowledge is, and can, because of its nature, correct its own errors. It is a self-corrective method. There is uncertainty in any method of gaining knowledge, but the smallest degree of uncertainty may be found in empiricism.<sup>8</sup>

Though there be a tentative element in starting out to find out more about God, we at least know something of him. We know that He is the "best to be discovered", and that knowledge is empirical since we know good and bad in experience, and God is certainly an extension of Good, if nothing more. Our proposition does not tell us much of the nature of God, but it tells us God exists and that we must look empirically further to find out what He is.<sup>9</sup>

Walker concludes by making very important distinctions between belief, knowledge, and faith. Belief is the conviction that a proposition is true. Knowledge is the proposition confirmed by evidence and faith is commitment that can be based on either knowledge or belief. Faith is, therefore, not conviction that goes beyond the evidence.

Tentativeness is essential, then, if we would be sure that when we commit ourselves, we do so to an object and not a mere idea of an object.

Tentativeness of belief, therefore, is not only an element in all empirical

---

<sup>8</sup> Walker, op. cit., pp. 326-327

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 328



knowledge; it is essential to any high order of religious commitment. (10)

In the next article Walker discusses the religious objections to empiricism, and in the constructive suggestions he offers after refuting the criticisms we see more of his empiricism coming out.

(1) Religion demands an attitude of commitment and personal loyalty, which empiricism wants detachment and objectivity; thus it is not congenial to the religious man, say the critics. We must keep in mind, says Walker, that there is a bias in all knowledge toward solution, and so we cannot say that any form of gaining knowledge is entirely objective; we want to know the answer, and in that there is a personal element. So there is a bias to find the object of religious devotion empirically, because if we are committed to it, we want to know what it is. Interest in the field may open up new paths of knowledge, whereas detachment would not, and empiricism is always suggesting and finding new ways to go. Empirical naturalism, in spite of the critics, does give us something to revere, something to aid toward; it is not just a laboratory science, as has been so well demonstrated in the practical results of men like Wieman,<sup>11</sup> Whitehead, and Hartshorne.

---

10

Walker, op. cit., p. 329

11

E. R. Walker, "Can Philosophy of Religion be Empirical?", Journal of Religion, Vol. 20, 1940, pp. 241-245





(2) It is said that empiricism cannot verify certain metaphysical ideas that are essential to religious living. In this criticism we are met with a fundamental distinction between the empirical approach and other types. For empiricism does not set out with a set of ideas or metaphysical notions and then seek to verify them, but rather it says we know God is, now let us find out about these other things that may or may not be essential to religious living. Metaphysics must come from empirical investigation, not a<sup>12</sup> prior postulate, else it has no meaning.

It is objected that empiricism cannot really have a metaphysics. In an ultimate and final sense this is true, but empiricism can make general formulations and principles which are metaphysically applicable to this age and the people in it; beyond this it cannot go. Again it is objected that the supernatural is essential to religion and empiricism does not have it. This may be true in the sense of awe and mystery, but to say the supernatural is unknowable is meaningless and frustrating to religion rather than helpful. Finally, Walker says of these so called "essentials" to religion, the idea of "being" as necessary to religious life, is pure speculation and has no ground in fact, unless, and<sup>13</sup> this he thinks is doubtful, it can be empirically proved.

---

<sup>12</sup> Walker, op. cit., pp. 245; 247-248

<sup>13</sup> "Can Philosophy of Religion be Empirical?" (Second article) pp. 249-250



(Thus he has dealt with metaphysical objections.)

(3) It is said that the only method of Christian insight is revelation. This Walker objects to, as does R. C. Miller as we shall see later, by saying that there is no one method of insight, but several, and the most adequate one or ones for each age must be used. When the symbols of the past cease to have value today then they must be analyzed to see what is wrong with them. When errors are found they must be corrected, new concepts must be built, and they, in turn, must be turned into symbols by the theologian to fit the present cultus or the cultus must be changed. Here is where empiricism works as a method of knowledge and correction. It is essential because it is most adequate for the present age in testing and finding the best concepts that can be made  
14  
over into new symbols.

(4) The final criticism is that the method is inaccessible to the modern man and is usable by only a few philosophers. But, says Walker, the average man has always relied on secondary authority, and he probably always will, and it is probable that he will be more content with verifiable and testable beliefs than with "ex cathedra" utterances.  
15

Walker admits that what he has said above has not proved the complete adequacy of the empirical method; we need

---

14 "Can Philosophy of Religion be Empirical?" (Second Article)  
pp. 251-254

15 Ibid., pp. 255-256



first to examine other methods also. At least we have nullified some of the misunderstandings and clarified meanings. The method that we have suggested is more than one of mere common sense, and Walker suggests this tentative attitude-definition of

revising one's expectations to conform to observed consequences. (16)

The author realizes that in the present state empiricism may perhaps not go far enough, but he also realizes that there can never be an adequate method that is not entirely empirical, for him at least, the superstructure must be as empirical as the base. We feel justified, then, in saying that the line of development from Walker is one of rigid empiricism only, and that, at best, the possibilities of the future are truncated at this point. He has argued brilliantly for empiricism as a method, but something more is to be desired and Walker does not seem to offer it.

## 2

In an early article, J. B. Pratt asks the question, "Is it possible for theology to be an empirical science?" The answer to this problem, he states, depends largely upon what an empirical science is. An empirical science is a science that is based upon experience, including both pre-





scientific experience (the experience before the specific tests) and scientific experience of the object. (the actual tests of the experience)<sup>17</sup>

God, as the object of this science, must be a power not ourselves that is perceivable. This is verifiable in experience. But, says Pratt, it is verifiable only as psychology of religion; in this field it can be repeated; if that is scientific, well and good, for this is as far as the ultimate tests can go in a scientific manner.<sup>18</sup>

Mystic awareness is important as a religious method, but because of the disagreement among the mystics themselves, and because of the difficulty they have in describing the object that they are aware of, it can hardly be held that it is very profitable for any scientific knowledge of an object. The mystical method claims to have a special grace for its knowledge, and thus can hardly be called a scientific method, nor can we call the God of the mystics a scientific object.<sup>19</sup>

Pratt concludes that it is not only hopeless but it is dangerous to try to turn theology into an empirical

---

<sup>17</sup>

J. B. Pratt, "Can Theology be made an Empirical Science?", American Journal of Theology, Vol. 24, 1920, p. 180

<sup>18</sup>

Ibid., pp. 184-185

<sup>19</sup>

Ibid., pp. 187-188; 189; 190



science--dangerous, because to his way of thinking, if it were to turn into a science it would tend to identify itself with psychology of religion and identify God with the idea of God in the mind only. This does not mean that empirical data should not be used; it must be used. Through its use new data and ideas will be found that will point to God and His nature in a way never thought of before, and His effect on human life will be greatly enhanced. Pratt would rather call these conclusions that point to the future an empirical metaphysics because of their deductive nature, rather than an empirical science.<sup>20</sup> In his early days, as still, Pratt holds the torch for empiricism, but not as a science, strictly speaking.

Naturalism is the specific thing we wish to deal with in considering Pratt. This field of knowledge is growing fast today. Those who would try to stop it would at the same time try to stop the empirical method and approach. Pratt's book, Naturalism, is largely an attempt to distinguish between two kinds of naturalism, crude and critical. Naturalism, as such, is not to be identified with any particular system but rather with the empirical method as a whole; thus it is that naturalists may hold different theories at different times.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> "Can Theology be made an Empirical Science?" p. 190

<sup>21</sup> H. N. Wieman, Review of Naturalism, by James B. Pratt, Christendom, Vol. 4, 1939, pp. 452-453



Naturalism arises out of necessity, since man must have not only the cooperation of other men, but also must know what to expect in the events of the universe about him and how they are interrelated and connected.

Naturalism is the view that arises when it is seen that this totality comprises all that can ever be known by the empirical method, and that the empirical method is the only way that anything can be known about concrete reality.

In other words, temporal events, relations and interactions<sup>22</sup> make up all that there is to know in the universe.

How, then, we may ask, does supernaturalism come about? When events are interrelated and some kind of a system is worked out, all is well until some new event or object arises that does not fit into the system. How is it to be treated? There are three ways: (1) it can be ignored as we stick to the old system; (2) we can rework the old and re-examine the new until a new and richer order is seen including both the old and the new; (this is Pratt's critical naturalism) or (3) we may not try and connect the event with the system in any way, but may let it be on the outside and un-understood to satisfy a craving that would not be satisfied were it a part of the system. This last is the first step<sup>23</sup> in supernaturalism. But the great foes of naturalism are

---

22

Wieman, op. cit., p. 453

23

Ibid., pp. 453-454





not the supernaturalists, but the crude naturalists who try to exclude from their scope many of the factors of life and experience, including the denial of religion.<sup>24</sup>

We turn to Pratt's book and shall discuss the chapter dealing with religion, morality and naturalism, for it is in this regard that we feel he offers a suggestive trend for the future.

Naturalism is primarily interested in religion and ethics as they live in man as he deals with them, not as they exist, if they do, in an authoritarian system. Pratt refuses to see the place of either intuitionist ethics or Kantian ethics in the present world.<sup>25</sup>

Naturalistic ethics must be tentative and experimental at all times. But ethics are not purely relative. The problem then arises, What is the criterion for a naturalistic ethic? Naturalism answers that the wise, the justifiable, the defensible way to live is the best way, provided this is not thought of in purely utilitarian terms. He phrases the ethical doctrine of critical naturalism like this:

Good conduct is rationally justifiable conduct and this means conduct for the sake of the greatest relevant values.....The good life is the life that helps to make real these things. To act for the sake of them is the content of duty. (26)

---

<sup>24</sup>Wieman, op. cit., p. 454

<sup>25</sup>J. B. Pratt, Naturalism, New Haven; Yale University Press, 1939, pp. 143-148

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., pp. 149-163



Since religion and morality are closely bound, and Pratt brings out this empirical point very well, it is at this place in his writing that he seems to suggest the trend of the future along the lines of naturalism, and possibly beyond. (In religion or morality)

The naturalistic philosopher is, indeed, empirical in his thought, but he cannot limit his thought to a listing of discovered facts. Philosophy must speculate as well as record. (27)

This historic relation between naturalism and religion specifically is an important one. Naturalism proposes a system, but man has always felt that there was some kind of mind or over—all—ness in the universe; where can this fit into naturalism? Most usually it has not in the past; religion and naturalism have been enemies. This was so for several reasons. Religion dealt with the so called supernatural, and naturalism with the facts of nature and science, objectivity one could see. But as time went on the concept of science enlarged and new interrelations were seen; it became more than a mere segment of the universe bordering on the organic wholeness that it had always thought was the realm of religion. Open conflict was the result; science claimed more as religion tried to hold its traditional fort against a prevailing enemy. Today we are in the midst of this process.



Science is enlarging; religion, some of it, is still fighting instead of trying to see the contribution of the explanations of naturalism.<sup>28</sup>

Religious concepts have grown over the years also. God is more than a primitive tribal God today; he is more than a stop-gap for what men cannot understand. Thus this process inevitably is bringing religion and naturalism closer together, even if they do not like it. Both methods, in some respects, try to exclude the other, but they still become more alike and closer together as both become more analytical, more synoptic, and best of all, as each does see that the other offers explanations and mutual help in the common problem of explanation and adjustment. There will always be the reactionaries and the authoritarians, those who want their own tidy systems and do not want them changed by a new object (or objects), and simply relegate it to the realm of the supernatural and let it go. This is especially true in the religious realm, although some naturalists are just as narrow.<sup>29</sup>

If there is to be further cooperation between religious and naturalistic liberals it must probably take its start largely from the common acceptance of the kind of teleology involved in the thought of the Cosmos as essentially organic. (30)

The full implications of this concept must be carefully thought out in thinking of the future of naturalism and religion, a-

---

<sup>28</sup>Naturalism, pp. 165-167

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 168-170





part or combined, says Pratt.

Purpose or teleology must be recognized at this point, for surely it is the meeting point of science and religion. But it is here that there is great trouble also. Purpose can only be seen empirically operating in the individual in experience, and so is immanent. When religion is willing to recognize this organic and immanent relatedness or teleology, it will come closer to naturalism than if it insists upon its traditional transcendent God working on the world from without, and Whom we cannot know since we cannot experience Him. Naturalism, as well as religion, needs to accept the fact of a teleological and organic universe which includes the truths of both religion and naturalism working together. This is the only way man can ever<sup>31</sup> learn of his place and relation in, and to, the universe.

The aim of the religious man and the aim of the scientist and of the naturalistic philosopher are closely related. They share a common task. This task is the progressive discovery of more and more truth concerning reality. (32)

Thus the religious thinker, the empirical naturalist, and the scientist may all join forces to go on together to search out the nature of God whose best definition is still, "I am that

---

31

Naturalism, pp. 171-176

32

Ibid., pp. 172-178



I am". The search will never be complete, but it will be exhilarating and rewarding when insights are combined, instead of used against one another.<sup>33</sup>

Only one caution need be noted. Wieman states that the view that mind can interact with organism apart from organism; that is, that mind without body can interact with another body, is a false setting up of the mind-body problem. Mind and body do interact, but not one without the other. In Pratt's use, it is dangerous since it makes introspection the only source of knowledge, and strains his view of teleology to an almost mechanistic interpretation, as seen in the self alone, and not in the universe as a whole, where it can be seen as a fact.<sup>34</sup>

For Pratt, then, the future of empiricism lies along the lines of empirical naturalism in which the insights of religion will be combined with those of science and naturalistic philosophy. Thus will better values be sought, more values will be sought, totality rather than partiality will be sought, and religion and morality will be mutually enhanced.

Pratt goes farther than Walker, and in so doing

---

33

Naturalism, p. 178

34

Wieman, Review of Naturalism, p. 454 (Wieman perhaps misunderstands Pratt at this point, but the way the view is stated it leads to misunderstanding. I feel that Pratt needs to clarify what he means so as to avoid the pit Wieman fears.)



offers more hope for the future, but we still feel there is something lacking. Let us turn to the last of our men and see if we can fill in this gap in the possibilities for the future.

### 3

In the writings of Randolph C. Miller one finds not only an empirical approach, but a superstructure that offers the possibilities that the future, based on the past and present, seem to demand. Miller sees in the empirical approach not only the basis for verification of truth, but also the possibilities of a future that is at the same time methodologically sound, and religiously alive and vital. Traditional and modern in the same breath, it fits more completely into the Christian community than any other man we have studied.

Before we consider his strict contribution to the field, it may be well to say that Miller is a liberal, but he is quite specific as to what he means by that term. He does not limit liberalism to one type of approach in theology, though he himself might be called an "empiricist plus". Here is his definition of the attitude which connotes the true liberal.

Liberalism is not a set of beliefs;  
liberalism is not a theology. Liberal-  
ism is an attitude toward seeking truth





at any cost to cherished opinions; it is the conviction that revelation is still open and that men can find God's truth by honest searching; it is a spirit of open-mindedness and freedom and tentativeness and humility in the face of the facts and values of life; it is commitment to the fact of God's being while still willing to revise the concepts of God's nature. (35)

Miller discusses the place of naturalism in empirical theology which, it seems to me, is essential to understand as background before we can consider some of the superstructure, and in particular after what we have said of Pratt and his naturalism. The new naturalism, which seems to be the same as that advocated by Pratt, claims that all knowledge comes from the relationship between organism and environment. All knowledge is found and tested in this way, empirically. Differences of knowledge are attributed to differences in people in their environments. The religious naturalist is one who feels the impact of totality rather than the specific event upon him, but this knowledge is handled no differently than other types.<sup>36</sup>

Though God is known in this naturalistic system, he is not pantheistic; he is other. God is known only in His relationship with man, not His relations with nature alone.

---

<sup>35</sup>R. C. Miller, "Some Trends in American Theology", in Christianity and the Contemporary Science, (ed.) R. C. Miller and H. H. Shires, N.Y.: Morehouse-Gorham, 1943, p. 4

<sup>36</sup>R. C. Miller, "The New Naturalism and Christianity", Anglican Theological Review, Vol. 21, 1939, pp. 25-26



Naturalistic theism is not nearly as sure of God and just what He is as are the orthodox theists, but the naturalist is just as insistent that man must live in absolute commitment to God as are the orthodox. (This tentativeness springs from the naturalist's theory of knowledge, and demand for tested beliefs.)<sup>37</sup>

The most important aspect of living committed to God is in the present, though many naturalists see the value of the past and do not wish to sever all ties with it.

It is possible to accept Christianity naturalistically and empirically and still maintain that it is the most perfect expression of the religious way, provided its full implications are comprehended and accepted. (38)

There are, says Miller, three ways of looking at the new naturalism. (1) as the antithesis of Christianity; (2) as a temporary method for giving Christian truth in this age; and (3) as logically prior to Christianity serving as<sup>39</sup> the philosophical base to re-interpret Christian beliefs. This last is, in the opinion of Miller, the only interpretation that is correct and is fair to the important aspects of naturalism. Natural theology has always been thought to

---

<sup>37</sup>

Miller, op. cit., pp. 26-27

<sup>38</sup>

Ibid., pp. 29-30

<sup>39</sup>

Ibid., p. 30



be necessary, so it is not strange that this new naturalism should fill the place of natural knowledge in the new age. He then goes on to discuss the merits of this new naturalism.

(1) It is not a specific theology. It is a philosophical study that is wider than any one theology and serves as the base of a Christian superstructure. (2) It is empirical at heart. All knowledge comes from the analysis of experience and the deductions from that experience. This leaves God in the picture. (3) No matter what one may claim for Christianity, it can be analyzed by naturalism. The naturalist tries to get behind the "scenes" to the core of any system, to find out what is there. (4) The facts of religious living are not denied, for the naturalist can analyze the data better than anyone else. He can explain much naturally that the supernaturalist has to explain supernaturally. It is thus the logically prior method, in spite of the fact<sup>40</sup> that it has usually been later in most Christian tradition.

Here is where naturalism must stop if it is true to itself. It cannot go on into the supernatural realm for it does not have the tools that will keep it true to its pre-suppositions. However any superstructure that we build must be consistent with what has been laid down in naturalism if we follow this approach and think that empirical naturalism

---

<sup>40</sup>

Miller, op. cit., pp. 33-34





has anything to offer. The metaphysics of naturalism, which is most often condemned because it is not understood, is the only bottom stone for a truly empirical theology. If there is any natural theology, then we can call the new naturalism a type of that theology. It is not negative; it is simply tentative, waiting to see what will be added to it.<sup>41</sup>

It is in proceeding from this point that we feel Miller has made a substantial contribution in this field, and the reason that we have felt justified in concluding this discussion with his suggestions for the future. In this chapter we have considered the rigid empiricism of Walker, which, in our opinion, is too inflexible to allow any growth beyond the base and it even seems to narrow the base as well; and the naturalism of Pratt which, while it offers possibilities, cuts itself off too soon in its relation with religion as regards method.

With Miller we have looked at the base of naturalism, which, while not unlike Pratt's, is somewhat more specifically religious; we have seen what we can build on. Miller sees the necessity of something more if empiricism as a base is to have a reputable future resulting in vital Christian living. This "something more" must not be too disruptive of present concepts if it would gain a place in the more ortho-

---

<sup>41</sup> Miller, op. cit., pp. 34-35



dox communions such as the Anglican, and for that reason what he suggests hold particular possibilities for our denominational future, i.e., the use of analogical theology on an empirical and naturalistic base.

But first, the steps of the empirical method should be noted. They are: (1) the data from experience is gathered, (2) there is experimentation and analysis of the data, (3) using constructive imagination concepts and hypothesis are formed, (4) this in turn is tested by internal consistency, pragmatic value, relation to primary experience, and its consistency with other knowledge. (5) rational inferences are then made to give the final conceptual form that can be used. <sup>42</sup>

Full meaning is not derived by empiricism alone; metaphysical perspective is needed also, and this leads us to a consideration of the relationship between empiricism and revelation. Empiricism and revelation are not antithetical because empiricism is in reality simply another interpretation of revelation, how God works with man. Revelation is interaction between nature and man in which God speaks in the interaction process. This does not deny the special insights of the prophets nor the uniqueness of Jesus, since their lives and actions are verified by history. And no matter how we



interpret the fact of the incarnation, it is the same and is experienceable, since men have the experience of salvation in every age. Revelation is as limited as empiricism unless some such interpretation as suggested here be put upon it, for concepts revealed have no meaning until they are verified in experience. God becomes more real as we see Him in Christ; Christ becomes more real when we have had some experience of God in our lives. Thus, revelation so interpreted becomes subject to the same tests as empiricism for verification. This is fine for a religious philosophy, but for religious living we need more. We need myth and symbol and imagery that go beyond the methods of empiricism, but are true to its base, for in them we find the overtones that make life rich and meaningful.<sup>43</sup>

But beyond empiricism, we must not believe what we hear from one who says he has had an experience without using our critical faculties, and at the same time we must not dismiss what is said as of no value. Thus we need three guides to help us construct this superstructure: (1) an adequate value theory, (2) some kind of means for interpreting myth, poetry, and symbols, and

- (3) a satisfactory system of analogy, whereby these deeper experiences may be translated into the common experiences of every day life.





These methods are implied in empiricism but go further.<sup>44</sup>

Keeping these methods in mind, let us go on to a discussion of analogical theology. The method of analogy can provide concrete images in the place of the empty abstractions of pure empiricism, but these analogies must be critically as well as appreciately used. Theology is constructed for the purpose of communicating that part of the experience to another that can be communicated so that the person may have a like experience as others in the community. This is where difficulty may occur. For though our aim be to set up the right experiential methods in persons, if we are not careful the opposite reaction may take place.

The method of analogy is to appeal to an experience which is sufficiently common that it may be transferred to another realm of experience without altering the concept. This must be done consciously, for when analogy is taken literally it becomes crystalized and distorted and loses its force. (45)

In the term Father that Jesus used when he spoke of God there is much use of the common, and yet rich, experience of the individual who is familiar with the idea of Father, and thus the analogy makes a transfer into his own

---

<sup>44</sup> "Empiricism and Analogical Theology", pp. 403-404 (For a full development of the methods of interpretation and how they must be used in the light of the presuppositions of empiricism cf pp. 405-407)

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 407



experience. Analogy will not exhaust all there is to know of God (or any other religious concept or object), but it makes concrete the meaning of God by bringing Him to the common experience of the community. This is both empirical and beyond empiricism, being true to the base set up.

For.....not only are analogies necessary for communication, they are of paramount importance in the formulation of concepts which will bring the realities of religious living into view. (46)

Analogy provides new thought patterns; it opens the way for symbol and poetry and all the rich meanings that can be derived from them. Analogies cannot be taken as literally true; they represent reality, and are not truth in and of themselves. If these cautions are kept in mind, what is here suggested offers the possibility of making up for empiricism's deficiencies. Empirical theology is practical theology, and as such it must be able to extend beyond its restricted limits for new interpretations, consistent with its method and presuppositions. After all, God is always in experience, but he is also beyond experience; that tension must never be lost. God's nature is trans-empirical; our methods of knowing Him and understanding Him must be somewhat the same if we would have truth.

---

46 "Empiricism and Analogical Theology", pp. 407-409 (For more examples see these pages)

47 Ibid., p. 410



In another article, Miller extends this view that what we need is an expanded empiricism. We need to be able to take account of more than what we can directly observe. This will take into account history and all man's relations in his environment both past and present, social and personal. It cannot be bound by the sensory data of a pure naturalistic metaphysics.

The empiricism which is worth defending thus begins with the data of sense experience, is enriched with additional factors of human experience, and is supplemented by auxiliary methods. (48)

(There follows a discussion of the objections to empiricism and answers to them. We have considered many of them already in the section on Walker, and will not go into them at this point.<sup>49</sup>)

Miller concludes the article by saying that we are not to think that empiricism is any the less rigorous because it has a wider base and because it absorbs into it some of the richness of other systems. This type of expanded empiricism is important above all, if it can meet the objections of the critics, and we believe that it can, for one very important reason.

---

<sup>48</sup> R. C. Miller, "Empirical Method and its Critics", Anglican Theological Review, Vol. 27, 1945, pp. 27-28

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-34 (For criticisms and answers, excellently done)





.....it can present a complete theology which does justice to the history of the Christian religion in terms which are vital enough and concrete enough to win the allegiance of men to the God of Jesus Christ. (50)



## CONCLUSION



## CONCLUSION

We have a twofold purpose before us in concluding; the first is to define in some manner the empiricisms we have discussed, and second to show the value of the empirical method for present and future theological development.

Leaving Schleiermacher and Frank out of the picture, since they are not American empiricists, let us suggest a classification of the men we have studied. In the writing of Stearns, Clarke, and Macintosh (at his worst) we found that the use of empiricism was limited to a defense of the theological formularies of orthodox Christianity. It was apologetic empiricism, rather than seeking empiricism; it sought only to validate the past by present experience. Then we considered James, who, it would seem, is in a class by himself, seeking to justify religious belief on empirical grounds and the pragmatic theory of truth. James was not concerned with orthodox Christianity, but with religious experience in a broader sense. His major contribution was in emphasizing the pragmatic element in religious experience and bringing it close to life.

Then we took up Wieman and in considering his thought, and that of Walker, we saw that empiricism was a highly scientific procedure which demands critical criteria





for the validation of truth. With them, empiricism is related to metaphysics, and indeed must be if it is to be valid. But they limited the field by being very clear in their statements that what could not be validated in experience, critically and scientifically, could not be the basis of true belief. Empiricism for them could only go so far, and still be true to itself, and this did not include an adequate superstructure for religious living.

Pratt and Miller emphasized the need for a new naturalism which would include the insights of science and religion to build a new world. But Miller saw this as only a base, while with Pratt we felt it was the end to be desired.

Finally we discussed the possibilities of analogical theology, which is based on an empirical ground, but goes beyond, into the realm of justifiable beliefs, and permissible surmises; this reminds us of Macintosh at his best and seems to us to offer the only hope for the "right religious adjustment", because the field becomes wide enough for living, without losing sight of its empirical base.

These are the classifications we would make on the basis of what we have said. Empiricism then becomes more than a single headed animal. It is first the resort to experience to validate doctrines, in the narrowest sense. Then, it is that method (as outlined on page 213 that points to new facts and suggests new possibilities for conceptual formu-



lations. Finally, empiricism offers a firm, verifiable base for further theological developments based on its presuppositions and following the "five steps" (p. 213)

We have defined empiricism based upon our study of its history. The second task we have set is to see what the future holds in terms of the value of empiricism. If we have evaluated correctly, and if we have shown in their true light the possible lines of development, then it is immediately clear that in the empirical approach the future possibilities of theology are to be found. Not only because this approach is consistent with scientific reasoning and because it is "intellectual", but mainly because it works in terms that man can understand and truths that they can experience, does it hold great promise for the future.

Keeping in mind the definition of liberalism which was quoted on page 208, we offer this reason for our conclusion that empiricism is the way of the future.

Empiricism offers primarily a means of verification and reconstruction of Christian Theology and not necessarily the discovery of new truths; but when new truths do come, they can be accounted for on empirical grounds. (51)

Will the future, as well as the present, verify our conclusion? The answer to this question will be found in a further history of theology, in our day and beyond. This is one of the secrets of time!



## BIBLIOGRAPHY





## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aubrey, E. E.,  
Present Theological Tendencies, New York: Harpers,  
 1936
- Bixler, J. S.,  
Religion in the Philosophy of William James, Goston:  
 Marshall Jones and Co., 1926
- (ed.) The Nature of Religious Experience, New York:  
 Harpers, 1937
- Brandt, R. B.,  
The Philosophy of Schleiermacher, New York: Harpers,  
 1941
- Burt, E. A.,  
Types of Religious Philosophy, New York: Harpers, 1939
- Clarke, W. N.,  
What Shall We Think of Christianity?, New York:  
 Scribners, 1899
- Outline of Christian Theology, Cambridge: Wilson and  
 Son, 1894
- Cole, S. G.,  
 review of Religious Realism, ed. by D. C. Macintosh,  
Journal of Religion, Vol. 12, 1932
- Dubs, H. H.,  
 "Religious Naturalism, An Evaluation", Journal of  
Religion, Vol. 22-23, 1942-43
- Ferm, V. (ed.)  
Contemporary American Theology, New York: Round Table  
 Press, 1932, Vol. I
- Foster, F. H.,  
Modern Movement in American Theology, New York:  
 Flemming H. Revell Co., 1939
- Frank, F. H. R.,  
System of Christian Certainty, Edinburgh: Edinburgh  
 Clark, 1886 (trans. Maurice J. Evans)



- James, William,  
Varieties of Religious Experience, London: Longmans  
 Green and Co., 1902
- Pragmatism, London: Longmans Green and Co., 1907
- Selected Papers on Philosophy, New York: E. P. Dutton  
 and Co., 1917 (A collection)
- Kallen, H. M.,  
 review of The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, by H. N.  
 Wieman, Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 25, 1928
- Knudson, A. C.,  
Present Tendencies in Religious Thought, New York:  
 Abingdon Press, 1924
- Kroner, Richard,  
How Do We Know God?, New York: Harpers, 1943
- Macintosh, D. C.,  
Personal Religion, New York: Scribners, 1942
- The Problem of Religious Knowledge, New York: Harper,  
 1940
- Theology as an Empirical Science, New York: Macmillan,  
 1919
- The Pilgrimage of Faith, Calcutta: University of  
 Calcutta, 1927
- The Reasonableness of Christianity, New York: Scribners,  
 1928
- (ed.) Religious Realism, New York: Macmillan, 1931
- "Empirical Theology and Some of its Misunderstanders",  
Review of Religion, Vol. 3, 1939
- "Theology, Valuational or Existential", Review of  
 Religion, Vol. 4, 1939
- Miller, R. C.,  
 "Religious Realism in America", Modern Churchman,  
 Vol. 27, 1937
- "The New Naturalism and Christianity", Anglican  
 Theological Review, Vol. 21, 1939



## Miller (Cont'd)

"Empiricism and Analogical Theology", Christendom, Vol. 5, 1940

"Professor Macintosh and Empirical Theology", Personalist, Winter, 1940

(ed.) Christianity and the Contemporary Scene, New York: Morehous-Gorham, 1943

review of The Problem of Religious Knowledge, by D. C. Macintosh, Review of Religion, Vol. 5, 1940-41

"Empirical Method and its Critics", Anglican Theological Review, Vol. 27, 1945

Pratt, J. B.,  
Naturalism, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939

"Can Theology be Made an Empirical Science?", American Journal of Theology, Vol. 24, 1920

Roberts, David E., and Van Dusen, H. P., (ed.)  
Liberal Theology, New York: Scribners, 1942

Schilpp, P. A., (ed.)  
Theology and Modern Life, Chicago: Willett Clarke and Co., 1940

Seeberg, R.,  
"Frank, Franz Herman Reinhold Von", Schaff-Herzog, Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1909

Smith, G. B.,  
review of Theology as an Empirical Science, by D. C. Macintosh, American Journal of Theology, Vol. 24, 1920

review of Religious Experience and Scientific Method, by H. N. Wieman, Journal of Religion, Vol. 6, 1926

Stearns, L. F.,  
The Evidence of Christian Experience, New York: Scribners, 1892

Walker, E. R.,  
"Can Philosophy of Religion be Empirical?", Journal of Religion, Vol. 19, 1939





## Walker (Cont'd)

"Can Philosophy of Religion be Empirical?", Journal of Religion, Vol. 20, 1940

Wieman, H. N. (and Meland, B. E.,) (ed.)  
American Philosophies of Religion, Chicago, Willett Clark and Co., 1936

(with W. M. Horton) The Growth of Religion, Chicago, Willett Clark and Co., 1938

Methods of Private Religious Living, New York, Macmillan, 1929

Now We Must Choose, New York: Macmillan, 1944

Religious Experience and Scientific Method, New York: Macmillan, 1926

The Wrestle of Religion with Truth, New York: Macmillan, 1927

"God is More than We can Think", Christendom, Vol. 1, 1935

"Some Blind Spots Removed", in Contemporary Religious Thought (ed. Thomas Kepler) Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1941

"Can God be Perceived?", Journal of Religion, Vol. 22-23, 1942-43

"Primary Task of the Church", Christendom, Vol. 7, 1942

"review of Naturalism by J. B. Pratt, Christendom, Vol. 4, 1939

















GTU Library



3 2400 00687 2489

LIBRARY USE ONLY



